

**PROPHETIC PREACHING THAT REFRAMES THE UNDERSTANDING
OF CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITY IN THE
LIFE OF YOUNG ADULTS AGES 25-35**

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ABSTRACT

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This project is designed to increase the level of Christian responsibility among young adults, ages 25-35. The author used a combination of sermons and bible study curriculums which addressed the aspects of discipleship that would motivate young adults to re-prioritize their lives for Christ and the work of God's kingdom. Surprisingly, the project revealed that the level of Christian commitment of young adult new members was barely different from regular members 35 and over. The project revealed that the focus group of new believers showed an increase in most areas of discipleship.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The bible says in Proverbs 12:15 that “the way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise.” (KJV)

With that said there are so many people who have supported me during my doctor of ministry education that I can not mention them all. However, I must thank God first for blessing me with the ability (financial, mental, and physical) to complete this academic endeavor. I must thank my wife, Charlene, for once again playing a vital role in my educational accomplishments.

I also want to thank my children, Keonna, Tom, and Enandi for their understanding and support. To my parents and extended family that constantly supported and prayed for me, thank you.

I want to thank my friend and professional associate, Dr. William Bailey, for constantly challenging me to stretch my mind and ministry.

To the Abyssinia Missionary Baptist Church, in Jacksonville, Florida who continually supports me in my ongoing theological education, thank you. To my Discipleship Class who completed all of the surveys and lessons for this project, thank you for being my test subjects (not guinea pigs).

To, Sister Harriet Thompson, who worked with my incredible slowness and proofed my chapters as I finished, thank you. Finally, I want to thank all of my context associates, readers, and those who kept me focus.

PREFACE

This project was born out of a necessity to stop or at least decrease considerably a disturbing trend at the Abyssinia Missionary Baptist Church. The trend that this author is referring to is the rate of young adult new members that fall away from the church within the first 6 months of joining. As pastor of a growing church with multiple social ministries that are now mostly lead by senior members, it is critical that our new young adults become kingdom conscious and committed to Christ.

The purpose of this study is to assist pastors in the retention of young adult new members ages 25-35. It is the author's intent to provide pastors with a reproducible plan that will increase the level of Christian responsibility (commitment) in young adults through a reframing of their understanding of salvation to include discipleship.

The methodology that will be employed to accomplish this will be the use of sermons (prophetic preaching) and biblical lessons that address the maturation process of salvation that culminates with discipleship, and surveys at the beginning and ending of the project that will measure the status and changes in the levels of ministry participation of the young adult new members.

DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated to my wife Charlene, my daughters Keonna and Enandi, my son Tom, and my parents Dr. Tom and Lois Diamond. I would be remised if I did not acknowledge my best friend, Yoda, who sat with me through the nights while I worked.

KJV	King James Version
NIV	New International Version
NLT	New Living Translation
PK	Preacher's Kid
AB	Abyssinia Missionary Baptist Church

INTRODUCTION

At almost every five-star hotel there is a revolving door at the entrance of the lobby. Most of these revolving doors have now been modernized and come equipped with a motion sensor. The motion sensor allows hotel patrons to enter without having to push the revolving doors around, thus giving them easy access in and out the hotel. Although Stan Toler and Alan Nelson with their book, *The Five Star Church*, used some of the management principles of five-star hotels to create a level of excellence within churches, they probably would argue against five star churches having a revolving door.¹

Unfortunately many churches appear to have a revolving door as it relates to new members. For as fast as new members come in and join the church, a considerable number of them appear to go back out in the world without becoming grounded or committed to Christ or the church. In an effort to slow down the revolving door most churches have set in place orientation classes and require its completion before membership is granted to new members. While most pastors will agree that orientation and new believers classes have slowed the spinning of the revolving doors, pastors and church leaders still agree that the doors are still turning too fast.

In an attempt to slow the revolving door even more (with the eventual hopes of getting rid of it all together) there is a resurging demand for discipleship. The task of transforming newly converted Christians into committed Christians before they disappear

¹ Stan Toler and Alan Nelson, *The Five Star Church* (Ventura, CA: Gospel Light Publications, 1999).

out the revolving door has created a deluge of discipleship books and manuals in Christian bookstores everywhere. Authors such as George Barna,² Bill Hull,³ and George McCalep,⁴ just to name a few, have written numerous books on discipleship. However, the majority of these discipleship books, especially the latest ones, have surmised that the discipleship paradigm is most effective when done one-on-one, teacher to student. In his book, *Discipleship Essentials*, Greg Ogden breaks with the traditional paradigm of discipleship in favor of *triads* and even *quads* (groups of threes and fours) stating that it shifts the model from hierarchical to relational while adding a sense of “groupness” and more wisdom from numbers.⁵ While there may be a difference of opinion on how many persons can be discipled by one person, most agree that the discipleship process is time consuming, going from several months to even over a year. With the small ratio of disciplemakers /mentors to disciples and the expansive time frame required for the process, the practicality of making disciples of all the new converts before they leave back out the revolving door is unrealistic. As a result there is a pressing need to address the dilemma of retention as it relates to new converts before they fully become disciples of Christ or disappear back out the door.

This project was conceived to address the dilemma of new member retention that many churches are struggling to solve. As a result, the project was designed to increase

²George Barna, “Barna’s Beefs #5,” in *The State Of The Church 2002* (Ventura, CA: Barna Research Group, 2002), in Holly Peters, “Evangelicals on the Decline,” *Biola Connection*, fall 2002, 10-15.

³Bill Hull, *Choose The Life: Exploring a Faith That Embraces Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008).

⁴George McCalep, *Breaking The Huddle* (Lithonia, GA: Orman Press, 1997).

⁵Greg Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials: A Guide To Building Your Life In Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 10-11.

the level of Christian commitment in young adult new members, ages 25-35, by reframing their understanding of salvation to include discipleship.

The challenge of discipling young adult new members in the 21st century is quite difficult. Most churches will agree that young adult new members are somewhat transient as it relates to their addresses and phone numbers, making it a laborious task to keep up with them. It is believed that this transient behavior is the derivative of all of the transitions that young adults make in their lives between ages 25 and 35. The finishing of school and starting of new jobs, coupled with the moves from apartments to houses and the starting of families and having babies all combine to keep the lives of young adults in constant fluctuation. This author realizes that it is exactly this fluctuation and instability in the lives of young adults that send many of them seeking the church and Christ. At this critical juncture in their lives, while they are struggling to prioritize the things in their lives, getting them to become committed to Christ is a daunting task.

The challenge before the 21st century church is to lead the young adult new members, who are currently transitioning in their lives, to become committed followers of Jesus Christ. Until the church can fulfill this mandate it will remain critically short-handed in carrying out its great commission and effecting positive change within the community.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

The term Christian has become a very loosely used label that has been given to and claimed by countless of people. However, not everyone who would consider himself/herself as a Christian is actually committed to Christ. There are many individuals who simply have church affiliation and, as a result, consider themselves to be Christians. In determining who the real Christians are, there must be clarification of what is meant by the word *Christian* or *Christianity*. In his article, David Watson states that *Christianity* can be defined in set terms, two of which are *centered* and *fuzzy*.

Christianity defined in a *centered-set* deal with one's relationship with God. The *centered-set* uses extrinsic rather than intrinsic characteristics. In other words, it groups things or persons in terms of how they relate to other things or persons, instead of what they are in and of themselves. In defining the characteristics of the *centered-set* David Watson writes:

It is created by defining a centre, and the relationship of things to that centre. Some things may be far from the centre, but they are related to or moving *towards* the centre; therefore, they are part of the centered set. On the other hand, some objects may be near the centre but are moving *away* from it, so they are not a part of the set. The set is made up of all things related to or moving towards the centre.

While the centered set does not place the primary focus on the boundary, there is a clear division between things moving in and those moving out. There is an excluded middle. An object either

belongs to the set or it does not. However, the set focuses upon the *centre* and the boundary emerges when the centre and the relationships or movements of the objects have been defined. When the centre and relationships to the centre are stressed the boundary automatically falls into place.

Centered sets reflect variation within a category. While there is a clear boundary, within the set there is variation in nearness to the centre. Some things are near to it, and others far from it although all are moving towards it. There is no simple uniformity within the set.

Centered sets are dynamic sets. Two types of movement are essential parts of their structure. First, it is possible to change direction—to turn from moving away to moving towards the centre, from being outside to being inside the set. Second, things may move closer to or away from the centre even though they remain headed towards or related to the centre (cf. the old term "back-sliding").¹

With that said, then "Christianity" as a centered-set is defined in terms of one's relationship with the center (who is Jesus Christ both Lord and God). In other words one is a follower of Christ—the center—no matter how far or close he/she is as long as he/she is moving toward Him. The *non-Christians* are those who are not moving toward the center (Christ), but away. David Watson goes on to say:

There would be recognition of variation among Christians. Some are seen as closer to Christ in their knowledge and maturity, others with little knowledge and a need to grow. This recognition of variation in maturity and growth avoids the dilemma of choosing between cheap or costly grace. Growth after conversion is an intrinsic part of what it means to be a Christian and discipleship the other half of salvation.

Two important dynamics would be recognized. First there is conversion, or turning towards a new God. Second, there would be

¹David Lowes Watson, "International Review of Missions," *Evangelism: A Survey of Recent Publications in The United States*, 72 no. 287 j1 (1983): 423-443.

maturity, or the movement towards that new God in knowledge and obedience.²

In the *fuzzy-set* he describes *Christianity* as having no particular boundaries. In this set *Christianity* is not clear cut. It is not black or white, but grey (a mixture of black and white). In the fuzzy-set a person can be 30 percent, 65 percent, or 90 percent *Christian*. Since there are no boundaries in this set, there can be no exclusivity, which means a person can be both Muslim and Christian at the same time.

In light of David Watson's article, it is clear to see that some persons call themselves *Christians* from the perspective of a *fuzzy-set* definition. However, for the purpose of this project, the author intends to build off the *centered-set* understanding of the term *Christian* and those it identifies.

The Christian Church, then, is comprised of those who are the children of God (those related to or moving toward Christ Jesus). Although the New Testament describes the Church, the Old Testament brings clarity and definition to it. The new *people of God*, the new spiritual Israel, was God's congregation (ecclesia), having its beginning at Pentecost. The theological implications one can reach from being the people of God are: (1) The Church is made up of real persons occupying both time and space (2) God is the one who called the Church into being (3) The boundaries for membership are determined by God (4) The people of God are those who obey God (5) The response to God's grace is not only the initial act to establish a relationship, but a continuing act of maintaining

²Ibid., 424.

that relationship with God. Thus said, then the Church is comprised of a divine call and a continued human response.³

It is this continual human response and movement toward Christ Jesus (the center) that many new believers, especially young adults, find themselves wrestling and sometimes faltering with. As a young adult, this author struggled with Christian commitment and the response to God's call. This author struggled trying to live in two worlds—secular and sacred—while finding significance in neither. When the author was a teenager, he spent most of his time running from God and trying to distance himself from his father, who was a pastor, from the title of being a PK (preacher's kid), and from the expectations of following his father's footsteps into the ministry.

This author promised himself and those who would listen that he would never waste his life being a preacher. After watching his father pastor his first church, Saint Peters Baptist Church, in Gifford, Florida, and seeing the church at its worst, this author had no intention of allowing mean spirited and hateful folk to mistreat him. The vivid images of folk who had sat at your table and ate with your family last week, now standing up and cursing you out in the church's conference the next week, left this author wondering why in the world someone would choose to be a pastor and have to deal with people who are not as committed to Christ as they claim to be.

It would be several years later when this author's father would be pastoring Mount Bethel Institutional Baptist Church, in Daytona Beach, Florida, that this author

³ Harold S. Bender, *These are My People: The Nature of the Church and its Discipleship According to the New Testament* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1962), 14-17.

would see a church where Christian commitment and love were at their best. At Mount Bethel, college kids and young adults were thriving in ministries. Evangelism was more like recruitment in that high schoolers and college students were constantly bringing their friends to get saved and join the church.

It was during this time, at the age of 15, that the author had his call experience, one terrifying night in his bedroom while living in Daytona. This author was awakened out of his sleep by a menacing figure who would not leave until he prayed and told God that he would serve Him, after which an angelic figure lit up the room and relieved all fears. It would be years later before he would tell his father about that terrifying night. This author has always felt as if God had him here for a specific reason; although, he was never in a hurry to fully explore what all that would involve.

The author was well on his way to becoming a preacher before he was forced once again to move. This time the author was forced to move to Jacksonville, Florida, where his father had accepted the pastorate at the Abyssinia Missionary Baptist Church. It was there, that church life changed drastically. Again this author watched as his father argued and struggled with people—mostly deacons—who could care less about ministry. This author saw a side of the ministry that he hardly knew existed. The thought of constantly trying to please folk who were never satisfied and always trying to control you, repulsed this author to no end. So again, this author ran from his calling until his sophomore year of college at Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University in Tallahassee, Florida. After many unsuccessful years of running, it was there when the author finally submitted to the will of God and accepted the call of God into the ministry.

It was during this time as a young adult that this author's commitment to Christ was casual, at best. With starting a family and a career in the mental health field, the only time this author gave to God was a few hours on Sundays, usually preaching from church to church. Preaching became more of a *hustle* to help supplement the mental health salary and aid in obtaining the perceived finer things in life (e.g. home, car and boat) more expeditiously. It was sometime later that the author finally took Jesus at his word in Matthew 6:33 where he said, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." (KJV) When this author finally became more committed to Christ, his life became more significant. It was the constant attempts at trying to find significance in different areas of life and failing, that eventually brought this author back full circle to Christ.

Now at 40 years of age and pastoring the Abyssinia Missionary Baptist Church, the challenge is helping today's young adults become more committed to Christ and, in turn, finding the life significance that most of them are searching for. While in this transient time of their lives having a stable center, who is Christ, brings cosmos out of chaos for these young adults, a lot of whom are new members of the AB.

Abyssinia Missionary Baptist Church (affectionately referred to as the AB) is located in the city of Jacksonville, Florida. Jacksonville is also referred to as the *First Coast and Gateway City* of Florida. It is the first major city people come to as they enter the state traveling south on Interstate 95. Like many southern cities in America, Jacksonville's history is deeply rooted in segregation. From within this history Abyssinia Missionary Baptist Church was formed in the year 1919. The church is about 45 miles

south of Savannah, Georgia where the First Colored Baptist Church (the oldest black Baptist church in America) was organized on January 20, 1788, by Reverend Andrew Bryan and a few slaves.⁴ Though the church has had a few names, in 1936 it was finally named Abyssinia Missionary Baptist Church after the historic Abyssinian Baptist Church in New York. The name *Abyssinia* is the original name for Ethiopia and Africa. Refusing to be called *niggers*, *coloreds*, *blacks*, or even *Africans*, the New Yorkers forming their new church demanded on being called by the original name of Africa, *Abyssinians*. To a congregation living in the racist south in the '30s, '40s, '50s and '60s, the name Abyssinia reminded them of who they were and from where they came.

Today, Abyssinia Missionary Baptist Church is one church in two locations. The central location—referred to as AB Central—is about 5 miles from downtown Jacksonville and is located within the 32209 zip code. The northern location (AB North) is approximately 15 miles north of downtown Jacksonville. The church serves primarily four zip codes (32208, 32209, 32218 and 32219).

The church's focus is divided into four essential ministries: Evangelism, Education, Empowerment and Economic Development. The ministries are to serve both the community of faith and the communities at large.

Abyssinia has been committed to evangelism from its conception. The last Ten years, however, the church has made a concerted effort to keep evangelism as our top priority (or as Pastor Tom Diamond says it, *keep the main thing the main thing*). The

⁴Leroy Fitts, *A History of Black Baptist* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1985), 33.

church's mission statement is *Reaching the lost at any cost and Teaching the found to reach the lost*. Abyssinia's motto is *Witnessing is what we do*. The church has a full time Minister of Evangelism, Min. Richard Black. Every Saturday morning the evangelism team goes out witnessing in different areas each week. Every ministry such as the choirs, ushers, singles, couples, youth and districts (7 per week) are required to join the evangelism team one Saturday per month. This is one of the criteria in which the ministry leaders are evaluated each quarter.

The church has recently added Vision Keepers (VKs) program to boost evangelism. The Vision Keepers are members who have witnessed to and won an unsaved person to Christ or a saved person without a church home. Vision Keepers also encourage and assist new members through Orientation, baptism (if needed), three weeks of New Members Class, and the Right Hand of Fellowship. Each Vision Keeper operates along the lines of a mentor. They are not quite disciple makers because they do not lead the new members through personal bible studies. However, they do encourage all new members to attend one of the many bible study classes the church provides because the church is not only committed to evangelism, but also education.

Abyssinia is a teaching church. With over 67 Sunday school classes, a completely certified B. L. Wynn Bible Institute, and the ABC Preschool and Academy ranging from six weeks old through the sixth grade: the church is fully vested in educating people. As a church, Abyssinia's preschool and academy provides the academic foundation and framework for over 200 students every year. The majority of these students are significantly more advanced than most of their public school counterparts by the time

they reach the seventh grade. Abyssinia is committed to children who decide to go to college by providing scholarships each semester. The church is also equipping and empowering believers through the transformative teaching of the word of God.

Another focus of the church is the empowerment of the people. Pastor Tom E. Diamond has long believed that the pastor and the church must be the voice of the voiceless. The church must always be free enough to keep its prophetic voice. Like the prophet Nathan who walked into the palace and (because he was not on the king's payroll) pointed his finger at King David and told him he was the man who had committed the horrific atrocity in the kingdom, the pastor and the church must be free to oppose, protest and fight against the injustices of those who are marginalized. Through the church's mission ministries, we assist those who are down and out by feeding, clothing and providing bill assistance. With our AIDS Prevention and Education for Life (A.P.E.L.) ministry, we empower the people in our communities with education, protection, and testing in order to lower the rate of HIV infections.

Finally, the church promotes economic development within the north side communities. The church encourages and supports members who become entrepreneurs. As a result, the church has an entrepreneur ministry that assists, educates, supports and promotes business owners.

DEMOGRAPHICS OF MEMBERSHIP

From 2000 to 2005 Abyssinia has averaged about 200 new members per year. The majority of them have been between the ages of 15 and 35 and lives within the 32209 zip code.

In October 2005 construction of the new church was completed. The church is currently doing ministry in two locations. The zip codes that are now in proximity of both locations are 32208, 32209, 32218 and 32219. The majority of the members reside within these zip codes with 32209 leading the way as shown in Appendix A. In 2006 the church took in 511 new members mostly from the 32218 and 32209 zip codes. It is believed that within the next four years the majority of new members will come from the 32218 zip code (Appendix A, Table 2). The majority of new intakes ranged from the ages of 18 to 35. However, there are a large number of new members between the ages of 20 to 30 who are slightly transient in that their addresses and phone numbers change about every six months.

The church concluded the year, 2007, with 331 new members. The active membership for the year 2007 consisted of about 2,860 members. That number consisted of 894 married members and 1,072 single members. The majority of the members were within the ages of 18 through 35, followed by those ranging from 36 to 50 years of age. The third largest group was those from age 51 and up; however, this is the group that makes up most of the church's social ministries—feeding, clothing, and care.

As time progresses there is a need for younger members to step-up and work in ministries that are declining because of the inability of older members to continue

ministry work as their health declines. In order to fill the void in ministries, it is tantamount to the church that young adult members move from being casual church attendees to committed Christians.

CHAPTER TWO
THE STATE OF THE ART IN THIS MINISTRY MODEL
A CHARGE TO KEEP

It all begins with preaching. The Apostle Paul states that “it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believed.”¹ As strange as it may sound and as hard as it is to believe, God has empowered the preaching of God’s word to change lives, families, communities and the world. Even when done incorrectly and by those with arterial motives, preaching the gospel still save lives.

In Philippians the Apostle Paul shared how he felt about those who were preaching for all the wrong reasons when he said, “I rejoice. And I will continue to rejoice.”² For the Apostle Paul understood that the power of preaching has endless potential to effect change. Bultmann said that preaching is different from all other forms of communication because it has in it a redemptive event.³ As powerful as the preaching of the gospel is, God understood that it still had to be delivered by preachers. That is why

¹1Cor. 1:21b [KJV].

²Phil.1:18 [NLT].

³Rudolf Bultmann, *Theologie des Neyen Testaments* (Tubingen, Germany: J. C. B. Mohr, 1948).

Paul wrote,

How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed?
And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?
And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they
preach, except they be sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the
feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings
of good things!⁴

Samuel Proctor states that this text signifies “that the preacher has an implicit contract with those who hear.”⁵ It is imperative that the Word of God be declared with conviction and relevance to the hearer. However, in order for lives to be changed by the preaching of God’s word, there first must be a preacher, someone who will accept the call/charge of God to proclaim God’s message.

It is the call/charge from God that every preacher, once accepted, must keep. Like the prophets of old (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Amos) the preacher must proclaim the word of God to all people. Gardner C. Taylor states that preachers are ambassadors of the kingdom of God, and as such, they are to address the ultimatums and the terms of the kingdom they represent. As ambassadors of a kingdom greater than the United States of America (or any other country in the world), the preachers’ power comes from the ultimate authority of God their king. So as ambassadors, the preachers bring to a chaotic world the peace, promises and the final propositions of God their king.⁶

⁴Rom. 10:14-15 [KJV].

⁵Samuel D. Proctor, *How Shall They Hear? Effective Preaching for Vital Faith* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1992), 10.

⁶Gardner Taylor, pastor emeritus of the Concord Baptist Church of Christ, Brooklyn, New York: Taped interview quoted in Cleophus J. Larue, *Power In The Pulpit* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 146.

It has been said by some that the preacher stands between God and man as a conduit through which the complex and sometimes camouflaged will, words and works of God are communicated to the people in clear and simplistic terms. However, this author believes that the preacher does not stand in some vacuum between God and man. This analogy places the preacher in a position in which he/she is out of contact with God and humanity until such times when the preacher is either receiving the revelation of God or revealing the revelation of God to the people. In short, this places the preacher out of touch with both God and the people. For this reason, this author believes that the preacher though called of God, still remains apart of humanity and is affected by the same life issues and struggles as everyone else. For the preacher must proclaim the miraculous healing power of God while having to wrestle, like the Apostle Paul, with his/her own personal thorns in the flesh. Instead of using infinite and infallible angels, God chose to use finite and fallible figures, men and women, to preach God's word.

The preacher is relatable to the people because he/she is one of the people, yet called of God. This allows the preacher to marry the heavenly message with the human malady. The heavenly message becomes poignant and powerful when delivered through the human condition. Through Jeremiah, God's word took shape at the potter's house. Through Ezekiel, God's word came alive in a dry valley. Through Hosea, God's word was painfully displayed with an unfaithful wife named Gomer. Charles E. Booth quotes Phillips Brooks' definition of preaching as the proclamation of "[divine] truth through

personality.” Booth goes on to state that “Truth” is immutable, but the personality of the preacher changes and evolves from his/her own life experiences.⁷

It is the life experiences of the preacher or those who are in his/her context, coupled with the divine, truth that makes preaching powerfully relevant. Great preachers poses the ability to make clear the divine truth by what this author calls “painting the picture.” Henry Mitchell, the great homiletician, argued that during the preaching moment, hearers needed a picture or a story in which they could identify. He continues by saying that one of the keys to great preaching is the use of vivid details and symbols, instead of syllogisms, for they are essential for experiential or emotional encounters and transformation.⁸

Thomas H. Troeger, building off Mitchell’s argument, states that the preacher’s imagination is rooted in and intertwined with the imagination of the community. He goes on to state within this context that “imagination is the visionary work of a culture that creates a universe of stories, images, and rituals to sustain its life by giving hope and meaning to people.”⁹ This becomes crucial for the preacher trying to make connections with new believers who mostly have a limited knowledge of biblical texts and doctrinal beliefs. With the use of images and stories, the preacher can now make considerable in-

⁷Charles E. Booth, *The Wedding of Biblical Truth with Social Justice*, Essay in, Cleophus J. Larue, *Power In The Pulpit* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 29.

⁸Henry H. Mitchell, *Celebration and Experience in Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990).

⁹Thomas H. Troeger, *Can You Imagine This?: The Future Role of Imagination in Preaching*, an Essay in, Martha J. Simmons, *Preaching On The Brink: The Future of Homiletics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 136.

roads to getting new believers more committed to Christ. Thomas Troeger goes on to state that:

Imagination as the creative work of a culture is more like a tree than a cloud. To be an imaginative preacher does not mean waiting for a cloud to appear in the sky of your mind. Instead, you graft your creativity to the richly rooted, thickly branched tree that has been cultivated by the entire community, that tree that is its heritage, its tradition of song and prayer, praise and proclamation, survival and resistance.¹⁰

The use of imagination to increase the reception and relevancy of the divine truth in the lives of young adult new members is an effective starting point for increasing their level of Christian responsibility. However, while the use of imagery and stories in preaching are quite effective among young adult new believers, the use of rhetoric in preaching may not be as effective as it once was.

Aristotle's use of rhetoric as a form of persuasion found what could arguably be its zenith in preaching. Although some forms of rhetoric can be found in the book of Hebrews and as far back as ancient Mediterranean times, it was Augustine who formally introduced rhetoric to the church. From that point, this rhetorical formula quickly infiltrated gospel preaching around the world. This new rhetorical form pushed preaching from a defensive posture into more of an offensive stand. The apologetic style of preaching employed by the Apostles Paul, Peter and John, along with such church fathers as Clement, Ignatius and Polycarp, was both defensive and defining in nature, and as a result, became almost completely obsolete with the spread of rhetorical style preaching. Rhetoric in preaching was persuasive in that its end goal was to create a desired affect or

¹⁰Ibid., 136.

response. This new form of persuasive preaching appealed “to the mind (What is the message?), the heart (How does it affect my life?), and the will (What am I to do?) [of the hearer].”¹¹

Once the rhetorical style of preaching reached the Americas, it became the dominate style up until the mid 1960s. The redundancy of preachers constantly wrapping sermons around a three point appeal to one’s mind, heart, and will eventually became rigid and non-engaging. Fred Craddock states that rhetorical style preaching was eventually reduced to what some jokingly call “three points and a poem.”¹² Needless to say, this style of preaching failed to fully engage the listeners and take into consideration some of their needs. It failed to allow them at times to ask critical questions of the text and allow them to come up with their own workable solutions. There is a point in the sermon where the listener, especially new believers, must take ownership of the biblical message that addresses the reality of where they are. Though this does not render the rhetorical style of preaching obsolete, it does place pressure on the preacher to be more flexible with his/her preaching styles because “three points and a poem” does not always fit the listeners of this present age.

TO SERVE THIS PRESENT AGE

Noted author, Spencer Johnson, wrote a very popular book in 1998 that became a bestseller entitled *Who Moved My Cheese?* The book, in a simplistic parabolic form,

¹¹Fred B. Craddock, “Is There Still Room For Rhetoric?” *Preaching On The Brink: The Future of Homiletics*, Martha J. Simmons, ed., (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 66.

¹²*Ibid.*, 67.

dealt with the dynamics of handling change.¹³ So profound was the book, that it became a “must read” for anyone in management. This author, along with other pastors, made it required reading for all staff and ministry leaders with the hope that they would be more receptive to looking outside of the traditional box. In response to the constant changing of people and time, the church must be willing to stop *hemming* and *hawing* over what use to work and how people use to be, and start searching for new solutions.

In his book, *What's The Matter With Preaching Today*, Mike Graves explores Harry Emerson Fosdick's timeless question in an effort to address the non-responsiveness of today's Christians. Although he admits that the preachers of the 21st century must compete against a multiplicity of distractions facing today's Christians that preachers at the turn of the 20th century did not have to face, he proposes that the lack of Christian commitment is primarily based upon the ineffectiveness of preaching today. He argues that the fundamental flaw with most preaching is that it fails to establish any connection with the majority of listeners within the congregation. This flaw is due to an obsolete pedagogy that begins with an ancient biblical text, a doctrinal truth, or a theological argument rather than the vital interests of the listeners. Graves concludes that effective preaching uses the project method approach which begins with the needs, interests and concerns of the listeners.¹⁴ However, there is a critically fine line between addressing the needs, interests and concerns of the listeners and approving the self-centered wants of the listeners.

¹³Spencer Johnson, *Who Moved My Cheese?* (New York, NY: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1998).

¹⁴ Mike Graves, *What's The Matter With Preaching Today?* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Pres, 2004).

Henry Mitchell, who argues that there should be a celebrative moment for both the listener and the preacher in every sermon, would also agree that the sermon, at some point, should confront and challenge the listener in order for there to be transformation.¹⁵ When preaching only approves and promotes the self-center agendas of the listeners then the preacher and the church becomes guilty of what Barbara Harris calls “cultural captivity of the gospel.” She further defines this as the “process [in which] individuals and groups seek to use the church to legitimate their own identity, power, and status rather than seeking to transform their identity, power, and status to the demands of the gospel.”¹⁶ This was commonly seen in the south during slavery and the Civil Rights era with white supremacy groups being a vibrant part of southern churches. With the awareness of the danger present in this type of euphoric preaching, the preacher must always temper and test his/her preaching that addresses the needs, interests, and concerns of the hearers. In light of this, this author firmly supports the project method of preaching which Graves argues in favor of.

Therefore, this author believes that every preacher should start by addressing the most basic of human questions that all listeners have: “what is my ‘razon detre’ (reason for being)?” and “how do I fulfill my purpose?” It is from this starting point that the preacher begins to address the needs, interests and concerns of the listeners. It is here that the listeners must be made aware of God’s desire to transform them and their lives. Every

¹⁵Henry H. Mitchell, *Celebration and Experience in Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990).

¹⁶Barbara Harris, “Can The City Be Saved? (Or Why Is There A Church On Every City Corner?)” *Preaching On The Brink: The Future of Homiletics*, Martha J. Simmons, ed., (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 126.

listener must be enlightened to understand that devoid of God no one can ever fulfill their purpose. "For in [God] we live, move and have our being."¹⁷

In using the project method of addressing the needs, interests and concerns of the listeners, Samuel Proctor states that there should still be four faith propositions that the listeners are reassured of or given. Proctor's four faith propositions are:

1. That God is still present and active in human affairs and intervenes in our behalf.
2. That spiritual renewal and moral wholeness are available to everyone.
3. That genuine community is a realizable goal for the human family.
4. That eternity moves through time, and immortality is an ever-present potential. We have already passed from death unto life when we love.¹⁸

Proctor begins with the world view of the listener and suggests that if it is devoid of God then the listener is left with no coping mechanism to put into perspective the vicissitudes of life, and as a result, will search out a substitute (e.g. alcohol, drugs, sex, etc.) to make life more bearable. He goes on to state that the preacher should affirm within the believers a faith that resides in the fact that God is forever active in the world

¹⁷ Acts 17:28 [KJV].

¹⁸ Samuel D. Proctor, *How Shall They Hear?: Effective Preaching for Vital Faith* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1992), 10.

and in the lives of God's children. The psalmist makes clear this world view in Psalm 24 which says:

The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world, and they that dwell therein. For he hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods. Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord: or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation.¹⁹

It is with this world view that believers - especially young adult new believers - are fortified against the chaotic realities of life. This becomes key for young adults who are new to the faith at a time when their lives are transitional. Just knowing that every life changing event (school, job, marriage, children, etc.) transpires in God's hands gives the a calm assurance to every believer.

The second proposition of faith that should constantly be expressed to the hearer through preaching is the constant availability for spiritual renewal through Jesus Christ our Lord. The believer must know, beyond any doubt, that no matter what his/her transgressions are that forgiveness through Christ Jesus is readily available along with complete renewal and restoration. The Apostle John writes: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."²⁰ So often new believers fall back into the sin(s) they abandon after coming to Christ, and feel as if they can not return to the fellowship of believers because of their transgression. It is the preacher's role to assure them that it is God's desire to forgive, renew, and restore them.

¹⁹Ps. 24:1-5 [KJV].

²⁰1 Jn. 1:9 [KJV].

The third faith proposition that the preacher should continually promote through preaching is God's desire for genuine community. Although Samuel Proctor was addressing the need for genuine community with those of different races, genders, doctrines, social status, ages, nationalities and so on, this writer believes that consideration should be given first to the need for creating genuine communities within the local church where there are division between young and old, men and women, single and married, existing and new members.

Since this project is designed to aid in the retention of young adult new members while increasing their level of Christian commitment, the creation of genuine communities of which they can consider themselves apart of is critical. The knowledge that the Spirit of God has transcended all of the differences of every believer and that all person are create equal, is what creates genuine community. The charge is on every preacher to make this faith proposition a reality by preaching the *one-ness* of all believers. The Apostle Paul alluded to this "one-ness" in Christ when he wrote:

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.²¹

Once this is done, then barriers of racial, social and gender indifferences can come tumbling down like Jericho's walls.

The forth faith proposition that should be preached continually to all believers is the reality that we live and exist in two worlds at the same time (this world and the

²¹Gal. 3:26-28 [KJV].

kingdom of God). Every believer must reach the conclusion that they have dual citizenship: one that is temporal and one that is eternal. The choice is which citizenship each believer will choose to live under. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus instructs and calls every believer to discipleship—or citizenship into the kingdom of God. This faith, once realized in the life of the believer, will enable the believer to let go the things of this world (like fame, fortune, and success) and take hold of the things in the kingdom of God which is present in the here and now (like service, suffering and sacrifice). It is the constant rejection of the flesh in favor of the Spirit that led the Apostle Paul to write:

For those who live according to the flesh think about the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, about the things of the Spirit. For the mind-set of the flesh is death, but the mind-set of the Spirit is life and peace.²²

The preaching of this faith proposition is tantamount in making disciples of young adult new members.

The preaching of these four faith propositions, this author believes, resonate with where the listeners are in life, while simultaneously revealing where the Lord has called them to be. The revelation of God's omnipresence in the world, God's endless desire for the spiritual renewal and genuine community for all believers, and God's call for discipleship should push the believer from a self-centered focus to an others-centered focus. The preacher must preach a gospel that confronts and challenges the listener to look beyond or outside of self in order to serve others.

²²Rom. 8:5-6 [HCSB].

Prophetic Preaching

Preaching that appeals to the masses, though it may draw crowds runs the danger of being superficial and ineffective. The Apostle Paul warned that “the time will come when [people] will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves [preachers], having itching ears.”²³ The desire to be a popular preacher has persuaded many preachers to preach a “feel good” gospel that crowds of people enjoy. This feel good gospel never mentions the devil, never calls out sin, and never confronts nor opposes anything. In their book, *Preaching From The Prophets*, James and Christine Ward explained the necessity for prophetic preaching today when they stated that:

The natural inclination of the Christian community, like all religious communities, is to adapt its witness of faith to its most immediate human needs. In doing this the community always runs the risk of obscuring the wider dimensions of the gospel, particularly the wider implications of God’s demand for righteousness and justice. What is needed, therefore, is preaching that recovers these wider dimensions and illuminates the ways in which the community obscures them.²⁴

Like the prophets of old who confronted the people of God with their own sins so they would turn back to God, so must the preachers of today confront the listeners with their sins and the sins of their society in order for them to repent to God.

In her book, *Contemporary African American Preaching*, L. Susan Bond states that prophetic preaching, different than other genres which may comfort the afflicted, is

²³2 Tim. 4:3 (KJV).

²⁴James Ward and Christine Ward, *Preaching From The Prophets* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 11.

preaching that intends to afflict the comfortable.²⁵ Prophetic preaching confronts and challenges the listeners to take action of some sort. Different than the rhetorical style of preaching that seeks to persuade and push the listeners to a point of decision; prophetic preaching seeks to apprehend the listener until actions are taken and change is made.

To understand prophetic preaching, one must observe the original prophetic preachers (i.e. the prophets and Jesus) in the bible. The prophetic form of preaching is basically defined by the Old Testament prophets both non-literary and literary. In 1962 A. N. Wilder was one of the first to argue that genre form and content should not be separated from each other.²⁶ In agreement with Wilder, Fred Craddock would go on to state that “the separation of form and content is fatal for preaching, for it fails to recognize the theology implicit in the method of communication.”²⁷ After Craddock, several other authors would present a multitude of texts advancing the idea that literary form and function of the text should have an influence on preaching styles. The prophets’ job was to inform Israel of what the will of God was and how that will affected the poor and the powerless.

In order to better understand what prophetic preaching is, it is essential to state what it is not. Prophetic preaching is not where the preacher proclaims futuristic events devoid of God’s activity in the world. The prophets of the bible were not fortune-tellers

²⁵L. Susan Bond, *Contemporary African American Preaching: Diversity in Theory and Style* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2003), 5.

²⁶A. N. Wilder, *Early Christian Rhetoric: The Language of The Gospel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971).

²⁷Fred Craddock, *As One Without Authority* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1971), 128.

or foretellers of the future even though a predictive element may have existed in their writings. Timothy Sensing states that "prophets were forth tellers of the message of God and the activity of God during times of crisis that impinged upon the common understandings of what was, is, and will be."²⁸

Prophetic preaching is not political. Contrary to what it seems, prophetic preaching does not reside with the Democratic Party or with the Republican Party. Prophetic preaching must always stay true (loyal) to only one party and that is God, even over and against (at times) the people of God. Prophetic preaching holds no loyalty with race, gender, or nationality. This is hard to accept by so many people who have America intertwined with Christianity and, as a result, perceive any unfavorable preaching to be anti-American, thus anti-Christian. The Prophet Jeremiah was considered a traitor to Israel because he spoke of Babylonian captivity as the will of God. E. Achtemeier states that prophetic announcements by preachers can not be bias due to nationality. For example, she states that there can not be a double standard as seen by those whose prophetic pronouncement opposed Hitler but not the bombing of Dresden.²⁹

However, W. L. Owensby calls preachers to be more prophetic in their preaching by taking a greater political position and opposing nationalism that either promotes or is silent about poverty, racism, inequality, and injustice. He states that, "Everyone likes a generalized abstract message that favors justice for the oppressed. But prophetic truth is

²⁸Timothy R. Sensing, *A Call To Prophetic Preaching*, "Restoration Quarterly," 41 no 3 (1999), 139-154.

²⁹E. Achtemeier, *Preaching*, 110. William Sloane Coffin, "A Neighborhood as Wide as God's Heart," in *Preaching as a Theological Task: World, Gospel, Scripture: Essays in Honor of David Buttrick*, eds. T. G. Long and E. Farley (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 32-37.

seldom general. A word of hope for the poor is a word of challenge to the rich; justice for the oppressed means judgment of the oppressor."³⁰ Timothy Sensing states that even though prophetic preaching has a part of judgment within its theological message, it also possesses a strong part of grace and future hope that was always present through the pre-exilic, exilic and post-exilic times.³¹ There is always the hope that the listeners will obtain or become that which God has mandated.

Prophetic preaching shifts the listener's focus, like it did with Israel in the Old Testament and in the days of Jesus, *from* how to worship, where to pray and what was lawful to eat, *to* how to live with God, one's self and one's neighbor. Jesus, who is arguably the greatest prophetic preacher of all times, has given the greatest example of what prophetic preaching is with his sermon on the mount. It is with this sermon (or series of sermons) that Jesus addresses the poor in spirit, the mourners, the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peace makers, the reviled and persecuted along with the assaulted, the sued, the subservient and the wrongfully hated. All of these were people who were powerless within their community. Jesus purposefully addresses those who were powerless within society and even the church with a message of grace and hope and a message of judgment for their opposers. Justo and Catherine Gonzalez state that God continually speaks through the voice of the powerless. They go on to note that the powerful have never heard the gospel.

³⁰W. L. Owensby, "Jesus' Baptism and the Call of Disciples and Prophets," in *Social Themes of the Christian Year: A Commentary on the Lectionary*, ed. D. T. Hessel (Philadelphia: Geneva, 1983), 76.

³¹ Timothy R. Sensing, "A Call To Prophetic Preaching," *Restoration Quarterly*, 41, no. 3 (1999), 139-154.

accurately. They state that today's preachers must give voice to the powerless that are absent from the pew.³²

Every preacher today must have, what Walter Brueggemann calls, a "prophetic consciousness." In his book, *The Prophetic Imagination*, he states that the prophet's job is to proclaim to the people "an alternative future to the one the king [or those in power] wants to project as the only thinkable one."³³ It is the preacher's responsibility to transfer this "prophetic consciousness" to every believer so, in turn, they can go back into their communities and effect change in others. Those who have been changed, as a result, of prophetic preaching, in turn, make the best agents to facilitate the change of others. In short, they become disciples.

Non-Discipleship Christianity

In the gospel of Luke, Jesus describe the criteria for becoming a disciple when he said "If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me."³⁴ However, the choice of becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ has mistakenly been seen as an extra choice for those choosing to make Jesus Christ their Lord and Savior. There is a thought, prevalent in western Christianity that a person can be saved without becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul states that all believers are saved by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus; and not of works lest any

31. ³²J. L. Gonzalez and C. Gonzalez, *Liberation Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1980),

³³Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1979).

³⁴Luke 9:23 [KJV].

man should boast.³⁵ However, James adds that “faith without works is dead.”³⁶ It is this author’s contention that faith absent of works is simply belief.

A story is told of a tight-rope walker who was very skilled at walking tight-ropes at extreme heights. One day the tight-rope walker had a rope placed across Niagara Falls and began walking across the falls on the tight-rope. When he made it across the falls the crowd that was watching began to cheer. Then he went across the tight-rope backwards. After that he went across the falls blind folded to the cheers of the crowd. He then proceeded across the falls with a wheelbarrow filled with 400 pound weights.

After succeeding to cross the falls with the wheelbarrow backwards, forward, and blind folded, he then asked those in the crowd “How many of you believe I can go across the falls with this wheelbarrow?” Everyone in the crowd said that they believed he could cross the falls with the wheelbarrow. Then the tight-rope walker asked for a volunteer from the crowd to get in the wheelbarrow and go across the falls with him. Even though everyone declared their belief in his ability, no one would get in the wheelbarrow.

It takes faith to get into the wheelbarrow because faith is belief in action or at work. It is this author’s belief that the growing problem with American churches is that there is such a disparity between believers and disciples. The American churches are being filled with people who believe in rites, rituals, and religion, or Christ, creeds, and Church, but not to the point of becoming disciples. This belief without action or change is what Dietrich Bonhoeffer calls “cheap grace.” Bonhoeffer wrote that “we Lutherans have

³⁵Eph. 2:8-9 (my translation).

³⁶James 2:20 [KJV].

gathered like eagles round the carcass of cheap grace, and there we have drunk of the poison which has killed the life of following Jesus.”³⁷

In his book, *Choose The Life*, Bill Hull address this problem facing the church today. He states that the Church in the western world is shrinking because it is making Christians but not disciples. It is this “cheap grace” that has become an enemy to the church because it makes a life of transformation optional for believers. Hull’s subtitle is “exploring a faith that embraces discipleship,” because he feels that believers need to reconsider what they mean by faith. He contends that faith that separates salvation from discipleship is not the faith found in the New Testament.³⁸ The New Testament faith is a belief in action or, better put, in obedience. Hull goes on to state that “faith without obedience is not real; it is nothing more than an intellectual exercise.”³⁹

Every new believer must understand that one can not be saved without faith, and that faith involves obedience to Christ and His will. The church has been guilty of telling unbelievers half the story as a lure to get them into the church and saved. Un-saved people were told that to get saved, they could come as they were. However, the church failed to tell them the other half. True, they could *come* as they were, but they should have been told that they can not *stay* as they came. As a result, the church has become plentiful with non-disciple Christians (fuzzy-set Christians).

³⁷Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1949), 57-58.

³⁸Bill Hull, *Choose The Life: Exploring a Faith that Embraces Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2004), 10.

³⁹*Ibid.*

The Problem

Bonhoeffer stated that “Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ.”⁴⁰ This author agrees with Bill Hull that this is the main problem facing the western church today. The American churches are being rendered ineffective because of the high number of non-disciple Christians. As that number increases, the rate of new believers becoming disciples of Christ decreases. Hull states that “this Christless Christianity has created leaders who are addicted to recognition and success and congregations that believe forsaking all things to follow Jesus is optional and a separate issue from salvation.”⁴¹ At some time in the past, the church has wrongfully separated sanctification from justification. So foreign is the term sanctification within the church that many within the Baptist denomination believe that it belongs to those who are Pentecostal. Most Christians today would agree that a person could not be saved without being justified or pardoned for their sin. However, those same Christian would state that salvation is possible without sanctification (being separated from the secular and sinful, to a sacred purpose/use). Both *justification* and *sanctification* make up salvation.

The Solution

The solution to the problem of non-disciple Christians is a return to preaching a gospel that makes whole again the unity of justification and sanctification as it relates to

⁴⁰Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1949), 67.

⁴¹Hull, *Choose The Life*, 11.

salvation and discipleship.⁴² Bonhoeffer does this with his statement that says, “Only the believer is obedient and only the obedient believe.”⁴³ This failure to obey is seen best in the story of the Rich Young Ruler. Although the young man believed that Jesus held the answer for inheriting eternal life, he was unwilling to obey Jesus. He wanted to inherit eternal life without having to give-up anything or having to follow Jesus. Bonhoeffer declared that he wanted “cheap grace.”⁴⁴ He wanted justification without sanctification or, simply put, he wanted salvation without discipleship. This guy wanted what Jesus’ disciples had, but he was not willing to give-up what they had given up in order to pick up his cross and follow Jesus. Notice that even though Jesus loved him in verse 21, Jesus allowed him to walk away in verse 22. For years this text haunted this author because this author could not understand how Jesus could love the rich young ruler and still allow him to walk away from eternal life to eternal damnation. The answer is simple: the bible shows over and over again that God desires to be first in the lives of God’s people. And, if God can not be first, then God will be nothing at all because God refuses to be second.

Every new believer and potential new believers need to know the whole truth; they can come just as they are, but they can not stay as they were when they become saved. New believers must know that salvation includes discipleship.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 450.

⁴⁴Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*.

Disciples Making Disciples

Evangelism in the 21st century has become a mass initiation into the church. Most American churches have been busy evangelizing people in an effort to fill their churches. The result of this has been the mass production of non-disciple Christians. George Barna, one of the leaders in Christian evangelism, said that:

Christianity has no cost in America. We've made it way too easy to be "born again"—perhaps much easier than Jesus intended. When do we get to the point at which we accept smaller numbers of intensely devoted people rather than feverishly investing in filling auditoriums and stadiums with massive numbers of the lukewarm "Christians" that Jesus promised to spew from his mouth?⁴⁵

The church must return back to making disciples and away from producing Christians by the masses.

Disciple making is a one-on-one process that involves the new believer learning how to live an obedient life to Christ and how to eventually teach the same process to someone else. For three years Jesus made disciples out of the twelve that he instructed to follow him. Most discipleship authors would agree that twelve are too many persons to disciple at the same time. As stated earlier, Greg Ogden breaks with the traditional paradigm of discipleship in favor of groups of threes and fours believing it to be better than one-on-one discipleship making.⁴⁶ However, in a church that averages 300 or more

⁴⁵George Barna, "Barna's Beefs #5," in *The State of The Church 2002* (Ventura, CA: Barna Research Group, 2002), in Holly Peters, "Evangelicals on the Decline," *Biola Connection*, fall 2002, 10-15.

⁴⁶Greg Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials: A Guide To Building Your Life In Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 10-11.

new believers in a year, it is nearly impossible to even have discipleship groups of three or four.

This author believes that the discipleship process can be accomplished in groups of ten, lead by two. In this group, the two persons who will be making disciples will still be, what Dennis McCallum and Jessica Lowery, call *models*. They describe the models as those who are willing to live in such a way that others can model their lives after them. McCallum and Lowery explain that the models don't have to be perfect; they just have to be committed to Christ.⁴⁷ The Apostle Paul said "imitate me as I imitate Christ." A model does not have to be as perfect as Jesus, just further along in Christian development than those he/she is making disciples of. Those who will be models must be paired correctly with new believers. Married Couples become modeling teams that should lead other new believing couples (four couples per group) into discipleship. Likewise, men should lead men and women should lead women.

It should be understood that the model lifestyle includes daily bible study, prayer and meditation; all strengthen through weekly bible study groups, worship and service to others. This process, along with a designated curriculum and a matching sermon series, should shorten the discipleship process to six months, and, in turn, multiply the number of models to begin the process over again.

⁴⁷Dennis McCallum and Jessica Lowery, *Organic Disciplemaking: Mentoring Others Into Spiritual Maturity and Leadership* (Houston, TX: Touch Publications, 2006), 104.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

In his letter to the Christians in Rome, Paul writes “that if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”¹ He goes on to say, “[that] it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.”² Many Christians, laity and clergy alike, would dare argue that this is the center of Christianity. So enormous is the salvific event of Jesus on Calvary and the believer’s confession of faith in Him within the church, that many homileticsians, like Dr. Carolyn Knight, argue that every sermon devoid of Jesus and the gospel story must have in it a *Christological Bridge* in which to carry the listeners back to the central message of the church, which is the salvific act of Christ on the cross.

Although God’s redemptive act through Jesus Christ and the salvation of those who believe are key to Christianity, it is not at the center of Christianity on which everything hinges, but at the beginning of Christianity at which all begins. However, the transformative power of God within the life of every believer is the center of Christianity.

¹Rom. 10:9 [NIV].

²Rom. 10:10 [NIV].

Transforming the lives of individuals and not just getting them to profess Jesus as Lord has always been the desire of God since the fall of man. It was never the intention of God for those who were sinners to become carnal Christians believing that the totality of God's redemptive act through Jesus was to save them from hell and guarantee them a place in the kingdom of heaven. However, countless times preachers have focused on "end of life planning" by asking the question of "where one will go when they die," in order to persuade people to choose heaven over hell by professing Jesus as their Lord.

As a result, many believers have satisfaction for their after life, but have no transformation in their current life. At times the church appears to be so wrapped-up in sinners being saved in order to get to heaven that focus is lost on God's desire for individuals to be changed. The church must be more focused on the intention of God's saving grace to transform the lives of individuals who, in turn, are empowered to effect change within their families, their communities, and the uttermost parts of the world.

It is imperative that salvation be understood, not as a single occurrence, but as an ongoing transformative process. The Apostle Paul contends in his letter to the Philippians that "[Jesus] who has begun a good work in you will carry it on to completion."³ He then continues along the same thought when he says "continue to work out your [own] salvation with fear and trembling."⁴ Salvation is incomplete until every believer, who is a child of God, is changed into a son (gender neutral) of God. Paul argues this in his letter

³Phil. 1:6 [NIV].

⁴Phil. 2:12 [NIV].

to the Romans when he states that “if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.”⁵ In his book, *The Release of the Spirit*, Watchman Nee, the great Chinese Christian author, describes this process as the inner man (the Spirit) breaking through the outer man (the Soul) to the point at which the outermost man (the Body) becomes a son of God and a blessing to all (believers and non believers alike). However, if believers are unaware of the transformative, or as the author of Ephesians argues, the maturation process then their level of Christian commitment will fail to rise above their selfish desires (outer man). For it is not until the believer’s selfish will is broken, that he/she matures and becomes more kingdom conscious.

Therefore, with this in mind, the challenge of the 21st century preacher is to equip and encourage individuals to participate with the Spirit (inner man) in the transformation/maturation process of becoming a more dedicated disciple of Christ.

With that said, it is the intention of this author to use the genre of prophetic preaching, biblical, historical and theological teaching, and discipleship surveys in an effort to raise the level of discipleship in the young adults, ages 25-35, of the Abyssinia Missionary Baptist Church in Jacksonville, Florida.

The challenge of raising the conscious level of young adult believers must be address in part through preaching. Paul says in his letter to the Romans, “How then shall

⁵Rom. 8:13-14 [NIV].

they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent?"⁶ The aim of preaching, in its simplest form, is for souls to be saved, lives to be challenged and changed, God to be glorified and, to the end, the kingdom of God to be advanced. However, this author believes that prophetic preaching, in keeping with the pattern of the Old Testament prophets, broadens upon the somewhat individualistic, scope of preaching in order to tie in and connect the believers to the social ills of their community.

Biblical Foundation

¹¹ It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, ¹² to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. ¹⁴ Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. ¹⁶ From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. ⁷

The letter to the saints at *Ephesus* has come under tremendous criticism in recent years. The authorship, the destination, and the time of origination have all come into question after recent critical analyses of the epistle. While it is not the objective of this

⁶Rom. 10:14-15 [NKJ].

⁷*The Holy Bible: New International Version* 1996, c1984 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Press).

paper to set forth a definitive argument in favor of one view over another, it is, however, worth mentioning. Scholars, such as the German, H. J. Holtzmann, have expanded upon the critical analyses of the epistle done by Evans, Schleiermacher and de Wette who suggest that the Apostle Paul was not the author.⁸

Most recent criticism by Edgar J. Goodspeed expands even further the attestation that the epistle's authorship is by someone other than the Apostle Paul.⁹ Though none of the criticism can dispute the external attestation of Paul's authorship, the internal evidence has strong merit. One such argument is the fact that this epistle, unlike Paul's undisputed epistles, depends heavily upon Paul's other letters, especially his letter to the Colossians. Goodspeed contends that out of the 618 short phrases into which Ephesians may be divided, no fewer than 550 could be traced to the undisputed epistles of Paul. Another argument is that of the theological discrepancies between Ephesians and the letters of Paul. Scholars believe that the theology of this epistle is much more advanced than that of the apostle Paul and at times, even contradicts him.

Not only is the authorship of this book debatable, but there are some real problems to whom this letter was intended. The earliest MSS are missing the words *at Ephesus*. It is believed that the letter was intended to be distributed to several locations, Ephesus being one of them. This is strongly argued due to the fact that, unlike Paul's other epistles; this epistle does not address any specific issue of a particular church, not

⁸H. J. Holtzmann, *Kritik der Epheser und Kolossergriefe* (Leipzig: W. Engelmann, 1872), 46-55; cf. *Lehrbuch der historisch-Einleitung in das Neue Testament* (Freiburg: J.C.B. Mohr, 1885).

⁹Edgar J. Goodspeed, *The Meaning of Ephesians* (Chicago, IL: University Press, 1933); *The Key to Ephesians* (Chicago, IL: University Press, 1956).

even the one at Ephesus. With the authorship and destination of this letter undetermined the origination date, quite naturally, remains in question.

The origination date of this letter, depending on authorship, varies from A.D. 54 to about A.D. 95. There are no historical markers, like the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70, found within the epistle. If we were to accept a Pauline authorship, the date would then depend on which jail he wrote it from. If he wrote from an Asian imprisonment, it would be between A.D. 54 and 61. However, according to the chronology of Ogg, if Paul wrote it while imprisoned in Rome the date would be between A.D. 62 and 64.¹⁰ Those who attribute the letter to someone other than Paul would place its origination between A.D. 90 and 95 because Clement of Rome appears to echo Ephesians in his letter to the Corinthians. Regardless of the authorship, destination, or origination of this epistle, there are some things about it which remain uncontested.

The form of the epistle entitled Ephesians can be difficult to determine. With large sections resembling a prayer and others sermons, the literary genre of Ephesians could be classified as part liturgical and part homiletical. Some suggest that if the epistle is from a Pauline imitator, then the literary form is pseudepigraphic. However, this author sides with C.H. Thompson who categorizes the form of this epistle as a *general manifesto* in that it seeks to show how the Christian faith could meet the hopes and fears of Asian believers and to remind them both of their responsibilities and privileges.¹¹

¹⁰G. Ogg, *The Chronology of the Life of Paul* (London, UK: Epworth, 1968), 176, 1771.

¹¹ C.H.P. Thompson, *The Letters of Paul to the Ephesians, to the Colossians, and to Philemon*, (Cambridge, MA: University Press, 1967), 19.

These Asian believers are apart of a multicultural social setting in which this epistle was intended. Ephesus was a densely populated metropolis that was surrounded by 230 independent communities consisting mostly of poor and uneducated people. Paul understood the strategic potential of Ephesus and made it a priority to stop there and establish a church at the end of his second missionary journey. Ephesus was located on a major highway that connected east and west. As a Roman province, Ephesus became one of the fastest growing cities in Asia. Although Ephesus had a somewhat strong Jewish presence when Paul arrived, the majority of its citizens were Gentiles who did not know God or how to live a devoted life for God.

It is the challenge of increasing the level of discipleship among these new gentile Christians that the author addresses in chapter 4:11-16 of his letter to the Ephesians. This challenge is germane to my context with the newly converted young adults at the Abyssinia Missionary Baptist Church in Jacksonville, Florida. In verse 11 the author resumes his train of thought from verse 7 with the gifts of Grace from Christ to those in the clerical realm of the ecclesia. As the author focuses his attention on the local church, he groups *pastors* and *teachers* together probably to suggest that they have overlapping qualities. Within the Black Baptist denomination, it is understood, for the most part, that a person can be a teacher without being a pastor; but, a person cannot be a pastor without being able to teach. It is the pastors and teachers, using their gifts for instructing, who equip or make ready the saved for kingdom service.

An in-depth look at verse 12 in the original Greek text provides a clearer understanding of the author's intent. This intent can be misconstrued or even lost when

read from the King James Version of the bible which is commonly used within the Black Baptist denomination.

¹¹ And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; ¹² For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: ¹²

In the earliest MSS there is no comma after the word “ἁγίων” (saints). However, the King James Version has mistakenly added one. As a result, verse 12 appears to be a list of things to be accomplished by the pastors and teachers mentioned in verse 11. For years, in the minds of many Black folk in the Baptist church, this rendering of the text has placed the responsibility of kingdom work squarely on the shoulders of the clergy. Further clarity of the text can be made by translating the word “πρός” (*for* in the King James Version) into its most common translation *to*.

When placed together with the word *καταρτισμον*, which is a surgical term used for the *setting* of a broken bone, the beginning of verse 12 should read *to the setting* (πρός τον καταρτισμον). Thus, translating verse 12 as, “To the setting of the saints into the work of the ministry to build up the body of Christ.” This translation keeps with the author’s anthropomorphic statement in verse 16 whereby he closes this thought (or ends the sentence in the KJV) by stating that “the whole body is joined and held together by ligaments.”

In verses 13-15 the author deals with the maturation of the believers which is quite relevant in the continual development of new disciples. In verse 13 the author states

¹²*The Holy Bible: King James Version*, 1995 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.)

that the ultimate aim of the believers should be their completeness in Christ. It appears here that the author alludes to the Apostle Paul's statement in Philippians 1:6 where Paul says "that [Jesus] who began a good work in you, would complete it, until the day of Jesus Christ." In verse 3 the author presents the unity of the Spirit as a gift to be guarded. While here in verse 13 he presents the unity of faith as a goal to be reached. He suggests that the ultimate level of maturity is seen in the unity of faith, while individualism is seen as immaturity. This is clearly seen in the Greek text with the phrase εἰς ἀνδρὰ τελειὸν which means literally into a perfect, full-grown man. Note the singularity of the word man not men. The church as a whole is seen as one only when the individuals have *matured* in Christ.

The two key words within the selected pericope are καταρτισμον (to set in place) and τελειον (fully complete or perfect). The former deals with the believer's *placement* (in ministry) while the latter deals with the believer's *purpose* (assignment in ministry or call). The intended goal is for believers to be placed in a position where they can fully perfect or, as the author puts it, mature in their call. This is vital for a church attempting to increase the level of discipleship in new believers.

The metaphor of maturity is carried over from verse 13 into verse 14. The author continues to express the importance of new believers maturing in Christ. Here in verse 14 the author reveals the dangers of immaturity. The infantilism of believers not only prevents the kingdom of God from advancing into the kingdoms of this world, but it leaves the immature believers vulnerable to be knocked out of place within the body of Christ and lead astray.

The author builds upon the Apostle Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 13:11 where he says, "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I *understood* as a child, I *thought* as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things." The author argues that infantilism's greatest weakness is witnessed in the mind where the believers' thoughts and understanding are vulnerable to corruption. It is the mind of the believer that *wavers* back and forth with whatever doctrine seems right or popular.

The Greek text says κλυδωνιζομενοι και περιφερομενοι which means "being blown and swung around." Like a spinning top, the immature believer's mind is made dizzy from the different doctrines being spoken by crafty and cunning people whose aim is to deceive.

However, in verse 15 the author contrasts the deceptions of crafty and cunning people with the integrity of the gospel (the truth). The word αλφειουντες, translated in the King James as speaking the truth, literally means doing (living) truth which is the key to maturity. The author then uses the anthropomorphic analogy of growing up into Him who is the Head as a sign of maturity. R. A. Knox points out that a baby's head is unusually large in comparison with the rest of its body. As the baby develops, however, its body *grows up* into a due proportion with the head.¹³ The thought of growing up into or fitting the Head of Christ brings the reader full circle with the author's argument in vs. 12 where the new believer is set or fitted for the work of the ministry to build up the body of Christ.

¹³R.A. Knox, *St. Paul's Gospel* (London, UK: Sheed and Ward, 1953), 84.

Old Testament Text

I believe that the story of Gideon, found in the 6 chapter of the book of Judges, is an excellent example of a person being *placed* in a position (Judge) in order to mature into or perfect his call which in turn aids the collective people of God.

Now the Angel of the Lord came and sat under the terebinth tree which was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, while his son Gideon threshed wheat in the winepress, in order to hide it from the Midianites. [12] And the Angel of the Lord appeared to him, and said to him, "The Lord is with you, you mighty man of valor!" [13] Gideon said to Him, "O my lord, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, 'Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt?' But now the Lord has forsaken us and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites." [14] Then the Lord turned to him and said, "Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Have I not sent you?" [15] So he said to Him, "O my Lord, how can I save Israel? Indeed my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house." [16] And the Lord said to him, "Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat the Midianites as one man."¹⁴

The author (or authors accounting for the three distinctive parts) of the book of Judges is unknown. It is believed that the book was composed from oral tradition during the early monarchy of Israel. However, scholars believe that the book received some form of redaction during the postexilic period, and then later in the 7th century, the book was shaped into its current form. The literary form of Judges has been classified as epic, a

¹⁴Judg. 6:11-16 [NKJV].

form associated with the heroic age. Cyrus H. Gordon has noted many parallels between Judges and the Greek epics, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.¹⁵

The story of Gideon in chapter 6 deals with his spiritual and developmental growth. This maturation process is similar to that of new believers in the church who are struggling to find their place and purpose in the body of Christ. The text opens with Israel once again doing evil in the sight of God and, as a result, being placed under the oppression of the Midianites. In verse 11 the angel of the Lord finds Gideon cowering in a wine press *threshing wheat* and says to him “the Lord is with you, you mighty man of valor!” Although Gideon in verse 15 argues against the Lord’s declaration by stating that he is the weakest person from the weakest clan in Israel, God still called him a mighty man of valor. The Lord called Gideon not by who he was, but by who he would become. The process of Gideon’s maturation parallels that of the wheat he was threshing. Just as wheat is transformed into bread, Gideon will be transformed from the weak coward he was, to the mighty man of valor God was calling him to be.

Through a series of test Gideon’s faith grew in the Lord. As a result, he was able to lead ten men into tearing down the altar to Baal and building up an altar to the Lord [their] God. Because of Gideon’s obedience to the Lord in tearing down the altar of Baal, the people of Israel re-name him Jerub-Baal (let Baal fight him).

In Chapter 7 Gideon’s sphere of influence has grown from 10 servants to 32,000 men. However, like the kernels of wheat that must be separated from the chaff, Gideon

¹⁵Cyrus H. Gordon, *The Common Background of Greek and Hebrew Civilizations* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 1965), 222-26, 283-84.

had to be separated from some of his men. The chaff, which surrounds the kernels of wheat, looks good; but, in actuality, it is worthless because it has no nutritional value. Gideon has 22,000 soldiers who look like warriors; but like the chaff, they are worthless because they are afraid to fight. God finishes separating the men down to 300 who knew how to watch and drink (similar to watch and pray).

Verse 8 of chapter 7 states that Gideon kept (in the Hebrew 'heheziq be', which means to take fast hold of) the 300 men. This implies that they too wanted to leave because they did not believe that they could win, but Gideon convinced them to stay with him.

After being separated from the chaff, the kernels of wheat are then ground into flour where it can then be made into bread. The culmination of the transformation of both the wheat and Gideon can be seen in verses 13 and 14 of chapter 7 when the enemy soldier reveals his dream of a round loaf of barley bread crashing into the camp of the Midianites and destroying them. His friend, in turn, interprets the loaf of bread as Gideon the mighty man of Valor.

In conclusion, the maturation of Gideon is achieved once he was placed in the position of leadership and full potential of his gifting was realized. His strategic plan of war and matured faith in God demonstrates his complete capability to serve as a Judge for Israel.

Historical Foundation

When considering the historical examples of believers who became known as committed disciples of Christ by way of their increased level of Christian responsibility hundreds (if not thousands) of people are worthy of mentioning. I have selected, however, just a few individuals and groups of Christians starting from the first century church and working toward the present.

The early church in Jerusalem, which is often idealized and believed to be the perfect model of the ecclesia, actually, when examined closer, was struggling with some major issues. The Apostle Peter, who appeared to be committed to the spread of the gospel, had serious hang-ups on accepting Gentiles. While the Jerusalem church is highlighted by Luke for sharing their possessions in order to have “all things in common,” it is soon revealed that there is strife because one group in the church is being neglected. In order to deal with the two factions in the church (Hellenists and Hebrews), the Apostle had the church members to select 7 men to serve tables. These men, who had already demonstrated honesty and high level of spirituality, were placed into positions as deacons to assist the Apostles in serving the church. In chapter 7 of Acts Stephen, one of the seven, becomes the first martyr of the Christian church for standing before the Jewish council and speaking wisdom that even the Jewish scholars could not debate. Philip, another one of the seven deacons, would go on to found a church in Samaria outside of the confines of Judea. Not only were the first deacons examples of dedicated disciples committed to Christ, but there would soon be many more.

During the persecution of the Christians by the Roman Empire, many Christians went the way of Stephen and became martyrs for the testimony of Jesus Christ. Up until about the 4th century, many disciples were determined, like Daniel, not to be deterred by the threat of being devoured by wild beast and proudly became martyrs for the testimony of Jesus Christ.

The Greek word μαρτυς (martyrs) from which we derive our English word martyr literally means witness in a legal sense.¹⁶ A martyr is a witness who is willing to die for his/her testimony of Jesus Christ. Christians living under Roman authority were often given laws that contradicted with the laws of God. One such law was the profession of Caesar as lord and death to those who would not make such a declaration upon request. As a result, many Christians held true to their faith and lost their lives as they cried out κύριος Χριστός (Christ is Lord). Thelica, a 4th century martyr who refused to obey the laws of the Empire over the laws of God, said

I am concerned only about the law of God, which I have learned.
That is the law which I obey, and in which I shall overcome.
Besides that law, there is no other.¹⁷

At the turn of the 4th century, Christians showed their level of discipleship to Christ by refusing to fight in the military. Caesar Galerius, under Augustus Diocletian's

¹⁶Walter Baur, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 494.

¹⁷ Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity, Volume 1 The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1984), 102.

rule, had all of the Christians kicked out of the military. Though it was not intended to be a hostile gesture, Galerius' army in Danube executed the Christian they put out.

After this in A.D. 303, Galerius convinced Augustus Diocletian to order all Christians removed from government positions and all Christian literature, artifacts and even churches destroyed. Galerius accused Christians of setting fire to his imperial palace and, as a result, Diocletian ordered all Christians to offer sacrifices to the gods. Although his wife and daughter, who were Christians, made sacrifices to the gods, the Grand Chamberlain, Dorotheus, and several other Christians refused and suffered martyrdom.

Under Diocletian's rule the church suffered the most severe persecution in its history. During this period many Christians were begged by their friends, family and former Christians to abandon their faith so their lives would be spared. While some gave in and abandoned their faith, many others went to their death as dedicated disciples of Christ. After forcing Diocletian and Maximian to abdicate, Galerius took over three-fourth's ($\frac{3}{4}$) of the Roman Empire. He was opposed by Constantius Chlorus who ruled one-fourth ($\frac{1}{4}$) of the Empire. After escaping from Galerius, Constantine joined his father, Constantius Chlorus, and later took his place. Meanwhile, the Christians under Galerius' rule were still being severely persecuted until Galerius became painfully ill. Galerius believed that the Christians had prayed to their God to kill him for his persecution. As a result on April 30, A.D. 311, Galerius proclaimed:

With all the laws which we have decreed for the good of the state, we have sought to restore the ancient rules and traditional disciplines of the Romans. We have particularly sought to have Christians, who had abandoned the faith of their ancestors, return to the truth... After the promulgation of our edict ordering all to return to the ancient customs, many obeyed for fear of danger, and

we were forced to punish others. But there are still many who persist on their opinions, and we are aware that they neither worship nor serve the gods, nor even their own god. Therefore, moved by our mercy to be benevolent towards all, it has seemed just to us to extend to them our pardon, and allow them to be Christians once again, and once again gather in their assemblies, as long as they do not interfere with public order.

In another edict we shall instruct our magistrates regarding this matter. In return for our tolerance, Christians will be required to pray to their god for us, for the public good, and for themselves, so that the state may enjoy prosperity and they may live in peace.¹⁸

With Galerius' decree, the worst persecution in the history of the church was ended. Galerius died five days later and the Empire was divided among Licinius, Maximinus Daia, Constantine and Maxentius. However, Constantine would eventually become the sole Roman Emperor. With the reign of Constantine and the making of Christianity a religion of the State, persecution of the Christians by Rome ceased.

The marriage of Church and State, though welcomed at the onset, quickly changed from what seemed to be a blessing into what now appeared to be a curse. Now that persecution appeared to be a thing of the past, people were becoming Christians at an alarming rate. The church historian, Justo Gonzalez, said that "the narrow gate of which Jesus had spoken had become so wide that countless multitudes were hurrying past it – some seemingly after privilege and position, without caring to delve too deeply into the meaning of Christian baptism and life under the cross."¹⁹ With the church having such a large influx of "so-called" new believers and the massive returns of those who abandoned

¹⁸Eusebius of Caesarea, *Church History*, 8.17. 6-10.

¹⁹Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity, Volume 1 The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1984), 136.

their faith to avoid persecution, the percentage of dedicated disciples were low. Faced with a church that had become married to the things of the world and Christians who were preoccupied with the pursuit of luxury more than the priorities of the Lord, faithful Christians began to turn to the monastic life.

Towards the end of the 4th century, many Christians decided that the best way to remain or become a dedicated disciple of Christ was to seek life within the monastery. In the monastery believers could live a life free from the pressures placed upon them by the things of the world. There, at the monastery, the Christians could commit all of their time, talent and resources to the Lord. For many years, the monastic life served as the counter balance to the loose lifestyle of many Christians.

Even though the monastic lifestyle was a great plus for the church, it did, however, have some flaws. One such flaw was the isolation of the monasteries which did not afford the monks to come in contact with those needing to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus' intent was for His followers to be *in* the world but not *of* the world. For it's in the world that Christ sends us out to advance the kingdom of God and make a difference in the world. Another flaw with the monasteries was that those who joined turned all of their possession over to the monastery and, as a result, the monasteries became rich and even owned large territories of land which lead to their corruption. Finally, the monasteries became prize possessions for kings and politicians who wanted their children and friends to control territories and become bishops. Monarchs and those of high nobility often had their illegitimate offspring made abbots and abbesses without any form of Christian commitment.

By the end of the 14th century the church had fallen under the control of abbots, priest, bishops, archbishops and popes with emperors who were more carnal than Christian. At the turn of the 15th century, those who were devoted disciples for Christ were few. Justo Gonzalez highlighted the problems with the church when he asked, “How could a priest resist corruption in his parish, when he himself had been forced to buy his position? And how could the laity trust a sacrament of penance administered by a clergy that seemed to have no sense of the enormity of sin?”²⁰

Even the good priest struggled to remain faithful in the Catholic Church that was corrupt on so many levels. It was becoming increasingly clearer that the church was in need of reforming. Probably the final straw was when Pope Leo X cut a deal to sale Albert of Brandenburg the position of archbishop for the sum of 10,000 ducats. Because of the large amount of money needed, the pope gave Albert permission to run a sale on indulgences (price paid for forgiveness of sins) and split half the proceeds so Pope Leo X could have enough money to build the great basilica in Rome.²¹

After the birth of the protestant reformation with Martin Luther and his 95 Theses, Christians began returning back to the earlier teachings of Christianity and back to being dedicated disciples for Christ. No longer following the corrupt practices that the Catholic Church had become known for, Christians began holding up a standard of righteousness.

²⁰Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity, Volume 2, The Reformation to the Present Day* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1985), 7.

²¹*Ibid.*, 21.

Ulrich Zwingli was the great protestant reformer from whom the Anabaptist movement started. Once Zwingli's teachings could not be disputed by the bishopric, the church broke away from the Catholic Church and Rome. Zwingli's main goal was to restore biblical faith and practice among the Christians in Zurich. Different from Luther and the Christians in Germany, the Swiss Christians with Zwingli insisted on only doing those things that were found in the bible. This gave rise to Christians insisting on being baptized again since there is no biblical record of child baptism. The re-baptizers or Anabaptist believed that baptism should only occur when individuals profess their faith. Because of the threat this posed to the Catholic Church, the Anabaptist were persecuted; some drowned and others killed.

From the Anabaptist movement came a Dutch Catholic priest named Menno Simons who joined in 1536. His followers would be known as Mennonites.²² These were believers who were characterized by their strict adherence to the bible, especially the teaching of Christ found in His Sermon on the Mountain. They obeyed civil authorities as long as what was required of them did not conflict with God's holy word. They lived lives that were totally devoted to Christ. They were later persecuted because they refused to join or fight in the military. Like the pilgrims who sought to escape persecution in the new world, the Mennonites also fled to the Americas to get away from persecution.

Once in America the Mennonites would break off into a couple of new sects. One sect would become Quakers. The Quakers kept with the biblically based lifestyle of the

²²Ibid., 59.

Mennonites and the Anabaptist. They were highly devoted to the things of God. It was only natural that their dedicated discipleship to Christ placed them in opposition to slavery. History records that many of the abolitionist who participated with the Underground Railroad were Quakers. Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, they exhibited a high level of Christian responsibility while many of their White counterparts chose to profit from human chattel instead of living a life of love like Christ.

The Quakers were not the only ones who had a Christian mindset and lifestyle that opposed the institution of slavery. In 1832 the New England Society was formed. This was an anti-slavery group that demanded an attitudinal change on the part of churches toward the challenge of slavery.

In February 1836, the Rhode Island Anti-Slavery Convention claimed "that the people have a right to expect of the ministers of Christ that they will cheerfully engage in the work of abolition, and to call upon them to proclaim the truth on this subject, as those who are bound to declare the counsel of God."²³ They held unreservedly, that "so far as moral means are concerned the system of American slavery is now sustained chiefly through the influence of the pulpit."²⁴ The southern clergy, especially the Southern Baptist, reacted sharply to the position that was being held by Northern Baptist.²⁵

²³Charles Octavia Boothe, *The Cyclopedia of the Colored Baptist of Alabama: Their Leaders and Their Works* (Birmingham, AL: Alabama Publishing Company, 1895), 22-23.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 28.

²⁵Leroy Fitts, *A History of Black Baptist* (Nashville TN: Broad Press, 1985), 27.

Finally, in closing this historical recitation of a few devoted disciples, this author would be remiss if he failed to highlight Andrew Bryan and the First Colored Baptist Church in Savannah, Georgia, which is the oldest Black Baptist Church in America (organized January 20, 1788). Andrew Bryan and every member of his church were constantly persecuted by Whites for their faith and commitment to serving God. Rev. James Simms wrote an account of their sufferings:

Frequent, then, became the whipping of individual members by patrol on the plea of not having proper tickets-of-leave, which finally culminated in the arrest and punishment of a large part of the members, all of whom were severely whipped; but Rev. Andrew Bryan, their pastor, and his brother, Sampson Bryan, one of the first deacons, were in-humanly cut, and their backs were so lacerated that their blood ran down to the earth, as they, with uplifted hands, cried unto the Lord; and this first negro Baptist pastor, while under this torture, declared to his persecutors that he rejoiced not only to be whipped, but will freely suffer death for the cause of Christ.²⁶

Despite all of the brutal and un-Godly treatment they received, they never abandoned their faith in God or their Church. Their resolve and their continual devoted commitment to Christ were eventually recognized and honored with a certificate for becoming an official Christian church. The certificate read:

This is to certify that upon examination into the experiences and characters of a number of the Ethiopians [not Blacks] at and adjacent to Savannah, it appears that God has brought them out of Darkness into the light of the Gospel, and given them fellowship one with the other; believing that it is the will of Christ, we have

²⁶Jeffrey R. Brackett, *The Negro in Maryland: A Study of the Institution of Slavery* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University, 1889), 177.

constituted them a Church of Jesus Christ, to keep his worship and ordinances. January 19, 1788. Signed, A. Marshall, V.D.M.²⁷

Theological Foundation

In dealing with young adult new believers, the church is faced with a tremendous task in getting them committed to the things of God. From kids, careers, clubs and Christ the young adult new believers are being pulled in every direction. The challenge of the church has always been to serve this present age and, in doing so, we must insure that our theology is personal and pragmatic for this now generation who live in an ever changing society. The great German theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, wrestled with the issue of church relevance within society.

In his doctoral thesis, *Communion of the Saints*, Bonhoeffer worked from two ideas; (a) the church as a human society (b) the church as a kingdom of God. He eventually concluded that the church is a product of God's action in history and existing human reality, and, as such, the church is a communion of sinners as well as a communion of saints touched by the saving acts of Christ.²⁸ The church can no longer be seen as separate from the community our congregants come from, but the church must become a vital part of the community. However, in order for the church to fulfill its vital role within the community, the believers (new and existing, young and old) must become dedicated disciples of Christ.

²⁷ "The Baptist and Slavery", *Social Science Quarterly*, December (1968), Vol.49, No. 3, 667.

²⁸ Shepherd's Notes, *Bonhoeffer's Cost of Discipleship* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), 3.

The Apostle Paul addressed the issue of the discipleship of the believers when he strongly urged them “in view of God’s mercy, to offer [their] bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God; which is [their] reasonable service.”²⁹ Paul argued that in view of all that God has done for us, we should surrender ourselves daily to the will of God which is the least we can do. Paul understood that pagan gentiles offered sacrifices as an effort to bribe or entice their idol gods into doing something on their behalf. However, Paul says here that God has already given them what they needed through salvation. As a result, no bribe was needed; but, in response, service should be rendered.

Bonhoeffer expands upon the believer’s response to God’s saving act through Christ in his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*. His general argument is when a believer fails to respond to God’s saving act by becoming a devoted disciple of Christ they, in effect, cheapen God’s grace. Bonhoeffer defines *cheap grace* as grace without discipleship. Cheap grace is the grace which amounts to the justification of sin without the justification of the repentant sinner who departs from sin and from whom sin departs.³⁰ It is a grace that we bestow on ourselves. Bonhoeffer goes on to say that cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, and absolution without personal confession.³¹ I believe also that cheap grace is a grace that seeks a crown without a cross.

²⁹Rom. 12:1 [NIV].

³⁰Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York, NY: Touchstone Simon & Schuster, 1959), 44.

³¹*Ibid.*, 44, 45.

On the other hand, Bonhoeffer describes *costly grace* as that which requires change on the part of the believer. He eloquently uses the parables of Christ to bring clarity to our understanding of costly grace when he says,

Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it man will gladly go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl of great price to buy which the merchant will sell all his goods. It is the kingly rule of Christ, for whose sake a man will pluck out the eye which causes him to stumble; it is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him. Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again, the gift which must be *asked* for, the door at which a man must *knock*.³²

Bonhoeffer goes on to state that grace is costly because it costs the believer his or her life, and it is grace because it gives the believer the only true life. It could be argued that the rich young ruler came to Jesus looking for cheap grace and a crown with no cross or, in his case, a grace with no cost.

He further states that grace is costly because it requires us to follow, and it is costly because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. Following Jesus becomes the content of discipleship. It is an act of obedience to the authority of Jesus Christ. It is obedience that makes our faith real. The failure of the rich young ruler was that he attempted to have faith without obedience.

After claiming that he had lived a morally correct life, Jesus told him that he had only one thing standing between him and heaven; his possessions. So with that Jesus told the man to sell off all he had, give it to the poor, and come and follow Him. The rich young ruler had faith that Jesus was the One to give him eternal life, but after he assessed

³²Ibid., 45.

his financial portfolio, his 401k's and all of his properties, he refused to obey Jesus. As a result, Jesus watched him walk away from life to death. This author has often wondered why Jesus never ran him down. Bonhoeffer makes it clear that Jesus demands to be first in our lives, and if He can not be first then He will be nothing at all.

Unlike the rich young ruler, Levi pays the cost for discipleship when he forsakes all he has, including a good government job, and follows Jesus. Bonhoeffer asserts that the first step in following Jesus is for the disciple to separate from his previous existence.

³³ Just as Peter, Andrew, James and John leave behind their nets and boats and follow Jesus, we, too, as believers, must be willing to forsake all to follow the One who called us. The content of discipleship is simply following the call of Jesus. It means to be exclusively attached to Him.

True discipleship demonstrates a noticeable change in the believer's lifestyle. This is due to the reordering of one's priorities around and after Christ. Samuel Proctor stated that within the gospel story we find disciplined discipleship. The good news of the gospel involves obedience and commitment for those who would be disciples of Christ. Matthew 16:24 says "if any one would come after Me, let them take up their cross, and follow Me." As Christians we are required to follow Christ. Proctor said,

No one is able to maintain this high level of loyalty consistently throughout a lifetime. We vacillate, and sometimes we are much better disciplined than at other times. There is a rat race out there that draws us into itself without our knowing. The next thing we see is that our lives, our motives, our choices have become secularized, practical, mundane, and privatized. Like Demas, we

³³Ibid., 58.

have forsaken Christ and “loved this present world” (2 Tim. 5:10). But regular and sincere worship, earnest prayer, warm fellowship with other Christians, good reading, and frequent withdrawals for reflection and quietness will pull things back into focus.³⁴

Being a committed disciple must be something the believer is willing to spend the rest of his or her life perfecting. Becoming a faithful and dedicated disciple is a must. For it is our commitment as disciples of Christ that will affect change within our homes, schools, communities and, eventually, the world. James Cone argues that the theology found in the Black Christian tradition is not one derived from the books studied in universities or seminaries, but a theology found in the Black Church and shaped by the Black experience within a White society. He states, like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., that the faith affirmations of the Black Church tradition as a whole, from slavery to the present, possess three pillars; justice, love and hope; and are lived daily in the lives of the disciples of Christ, making a real difference within our world today.³⁵

³⁴Samuel D. Proctor, *Preaching About Crisis In The Community* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1988.), 41.

³⁵James H. Cone, *Martin & Malcolm & America: A Dream Or A Nightmare* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991.), 121-127.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

Hypothesis

The hypothesis is that by educating young adult new believers, so they will understand that salvation includes discipleship. Anything short of discipleship is considered a Christless Christianity. The purpose of this project is: (1) to increase the level of Christian commitment with young adult new believers ages 25-35; (2) to provide a reproducible plan for other pastors and churches to follow in order to better retain young adult new members.

Intervention

The intervention consists of four sermons and eight lessons. The four sermons all fit the prophetic preaching mode (Appendix D). This mode confronts the listeners by prodding them out of their comfort zones to become responsive to the will, word, and work of God. The eight lessons were designed to teach the new believers salvation that includes both justification and sanctification while also giving them a biblical, theological, and historical foundation to support it (Appendix E).

The lessons were taught mostly using the project method. Modern pedagogy starts with the subject first and not the student. However, the project method of teaching begins

with the adult student first. The principle to this pedagogy is to arrest the student's interest in the subject matter trying to be taught and then providing the student with the answers/material he/she needs to better understand the subject. The students for this class were all new members who had recently completed Orientation Classes and had received the Right Hand of Fellowship giving them full membership to Abyssinia Missionary Baptist Church. The class, called the Discipleship Class, met each week on Sunday Mornings, during the Sunday school hour held from 9:00 to 10:00.

Research Design

The research design for this project is qualitative or descriptive. At the beginning of the Discipleship Class, the students who were all new believers were given a discipleship survey (Appendix C) to measure their level of Christian commitment and to give the researcher a baseline or starting point. In an effort to define Christian commitment, a survey was given to leaders of Abyssinia Missionary Baptist Church. In as much as these members are meeting the criteria for leadership (1) Tithing; (2) Bible Study twice per week; (3) Prayer Meeting weekly; (4) Evangelizing monthly; they have a reasonable level of Christian commitment. A third survey was given at random to members who were not new nor in leadership to provide a general baseline.

Students in the Discipleship Class were given DVD's and CD's of the four selected sermons even if they were present when the sermons were preached. The students were taken through the eight week curriculum that focused on reframing their understanding of salvation to include discipleship. At the end of the eight weeks, the students were given the discipleship survey again.

Measurement

The two areas that this researcher will measure to determine the amount of growth if any in the level of Christian commitment of the young adult new believers are: (1) personal commitment to Christ (was the believer able to give-up more of his/her self-centered desires, and choose Christ?); (2) public commitment for Christ (did the believer become more committed to the worship, work and witness of Christ). These results are reflected in graph form (Appendix B).

CHAPTER FIVE

FIELD EXPERIENCE

Preliminary

In preparation for this project the writer met with the new member orientation team and the new member intake persons to plan the start date for the Discipleship Class, which would be the focus group. It was agreed by all that the new members must first complete New Members Orientation class and receive the Right Hand of Fellowship giving them full church membership prior to being placed in the Discipleship Class. The writer felt that classes on salvation, justification, and sanctification that are taught in New Member Orientation class would give all of the students a working knowledge of biblical terms.

However, there was a concern raised by Minister Richard Black, the new members' orientation director that once they receive the Right Hand of Fellowship they may not return for Discipleship Classes. The writer determined that adding another eight weeks after they finished orientation classes would probably be too long to wait for full membership rights. Minister Cynthia Anderson (one of the context associates) would be the co-teacher for the Discipleship Class. Ms. Gwendolyn Gamble (a new member) was selected to be the class secretary and Ms. Ladawn Hendley was selected to be the outreach worker for the class.

This author wrote eight lessons to be taught in the Discipleship Class. The author also incorporated material on salvation that was taught in New Members' Orientation Class. This author's co-teacher, Min. Cynthia Anderson, was given all of the lessons prior to the class beginning; however, the students were only given four lessons at a time. Thirty notebooks were prepared for the students of the class. The notebooks consisted of the first four lessons and note pages. At the beginning of each lesson there was a purpose statement that described the lesson in a sentence followed by questions that the students should know once the lesson was completed.

The Discipleship Classes were held every Sunday morning during the Sunday School hour (9:00 to 10:00). Classroom space was created and all of the new believers who were being assigned to the class were notified two weeks in advance of the class starting.

Collection Of Data

The first class began by this author explaining to the students that the class was a part of the author's doctoral project and they would be his focus group. The option to not participate in the study/project was given to the participants; however, none of them chose to opt out. The author stated that everything that would take place in the class, including the surveys, would remain confidential. At that time the author asked for a class secretary in which Sis. Gwendolyn Gamble volunteered. The author introduced Min. Cynthia Anderson as the co-teacher of the class and Ms. Ladawn Hendley as the out-reach worker for the class. The out-reach worker was responsible for following-up with

any students that may have missed a class. This was done to lower the amount of absentees. After the role was taken, Ms. Hendley was given the names and numbers of those students who had missed the first class, in order, for her to contact and give an overview of what they had missed.

The author selected seven members of Abyssinia Missionary Baptist Church to be his context associates for the doctoral project. The context associates were: (1) Dr. Paul Freeman; (2) Dr. Sabrina Edwards; (3) Dr. Cynthia Anderson; (4) Sister Karen Britt; (5) Brother Eric Sparrow; (6) Sister Elizabeth Jones; and (7) Sister Johanna Ferguson. After meeting and explaining the doctoral project to all of the context associates, they were all given the project proposal to give them an overview of the project. It was decided that there should be two other baseline surveys given; other than the one given to the new believers. To establish a baseline level for Christian Commitment a survey would be given to the ministry leaders who are already committed to: (1) Bible Study twice per week; (2) Prayer Meeting once per week; (3) Tithing; and (4) Evangelism at least once per month. The second survey would be given at random to members of Abyssinia who were not in leadership positions that would serve as a general baseline.

The author also selected three professional associates: (1) Dr. Tom Diamond; (2) Dr. William Bailey; and (3) Dr. Clarence Glover. Each of the professional associates was sent a project proposal from the author.

The context associates asked to see the author's reading list and strongly suggested that more articles and current essays be used for background research for the

project. The professional associates agreed that more articles than books should be used in order for the author to have latest research in this field of study.

The first discipleship surveys (Appendix C) were given to the focus group for completion. The author explained to the group that they were not to put their names on the surveys. This was done with the hope that they would answer the questions honestly knowing that they had a level of anonymity. The students, in the focus group, were then told to fold their surveys vertically so that no one could see what was written. Min. Cynthia Anderson collected all of the surveys and gave each student a notebook with lessons one through four in them. The author gave all of the students an overview of the material that would be covered in the Discipleship Class. Due to the time restraint this author agreed with co-teacher to start lesson one on the following Sunday.

The author met with the ministry leaders of the church and explained to them the doctoral project which had just begun. The author then gave the leaders the same discipleship surveys (Appendix C) and instructed them to complete them. The same instructions, of not writing their names on the surveys, were given to increase the level of honesty by way of anonymity. The leaders were instructed to fold their surveys horizontally so that their answers were covered. These surveys would serve as a baseline for the level of Christian Commitment to be reached by the new believers. The completed surveys were collected by two of the context associates and bound together.

The context associates selected members of the congregation at random to fill out discipleship surveys (Appendix C) in order to obtain a general baseline of the congregation as it relates to their level of Christian commitment. Just like the previous

groups, this group was also instructed not to put their names on the surveys in an attempt to get honest answers by way of anonymity. The surveys were collected by the context associates and bound together.

The author began teaching the designed curriculum to the student at the second class meeting. The author asked the students, in the focus group, to finish the unread portions of the lesson and answer the questions for each lesson at home.

There were new students who were absent the first Sunday the Discipleship Class began. These students were given the discipleship surveys (Appendix C) by Min. Cynthia Anderson with the same instructions as the others. The completed surveys were placed with the others from the class.

In week four the out-reach worker, Sister Hendley, disappeared. After several failed attempts at contacting her, an alternate out-reach worker was used. However, dependability was not a strong characteristic of the next two out-reach workers that replaced Sister Hendley. After twelve weeks and the completion of the eight lessons by the new believers, the survey was given to the focus group for the second time and their anonymity was protected, again.

Analysis Of Data

The context associates collected all of the surveys and compiled them into four groups: (1) Leaders; (2) Random Membership; (3) the focus group's 1st Discipleship Survey; and (4) the focus group's 2nd Discipleship Survey. The answers to the thirteen questions/categories were counted and compiled by the context associates. Each group

was treated separately to avoid the possibility of cross contamination. The majority of the questions answered on the survey were tabulated individually and then divided by the number of participants in order to ascertain an average. For five of the questions this process was not applicable. From this an average of each group emerged.

The pre and post surveys, of secular habits committed before being saved, by those in the focus group, showed percentage decreases in all but one area (Appendix B).

The percentages of each decrease are as follows:

• Partying	50%
• Drinking	33%
• Cursing	55%
• Gossiping	67%
• Fornication	43%
• Being Spiteful	62%
• Adultery	53%
• Stealing	53%
• Lying	75%

The area of smoking showed an increase of 48 percent. This data was quite confusing to the author because the habitual misdeeds listed before individuals were saved should not have changed in terms of reduction after being taught a curriculum designed to increase the students' levels of discipleship; unless they were convicted about having previously lied on the first survey. This author believes that the percentage levels from the pre-survey and the post survey should have been close to the same.

The pre and post surveys, of the focus group, in the area of sinful habits stopped since becoming saved showed increases in most areas (Appendix B). The percentage increases are as follows:

• Drinking	23%
• Cursing	31%
• Gossiping	15%
• Fornication	23%
• Being Spiteful	0%
• Adultery	0%
• Stealing	7%
• Lying	8%

Please note that the answers for adultery and being spiteful/mean remained the same in both surveys. There was an 8 percent decrease in area of partying. The author believes that these results are more in-line with the expectancy of discipleship growth of those in the focus group after completing the curriculum and hearing the sermons.

The focus group showed growth in all of the stated areas of discipleship—using pre and pos surveys (Appendix B). The increase in percentages, of each area, is as follows:

• Witnessing	7%
• Daily Devotion	15%
• Attending Bible Study	31%
• Fasting	23%

- Prayer 39%
- Ministry Work 23%
- Mentoring 46%
- Loving Difficult People 23%

The area of church fellowship was down by 8 percent. The author believes that might reflect the busy lifestyles of new believers in focus group. Most young adults do not return to fellowship with other churches on Sunday evenings or during the week. As for the increase shown in all of the other areas, this author believes that design curriculum and sermons aided in the increase of discipleship.

In the area of daily bible reading the pre and post survey showed an increase of 25 percent among the new believers that made-up the focus group (Appendix B). The author believes that this also supports his hypothesis.

The final area of measurement dealt with giving. The focus group was asked about the percentage of income they tithed to the Lord in both pre and post surveys (Appendix B). The results are as follows:

- Below 10% 0% change
- 10% 31% increase
- Above 10% 8% increase
- Did not Answer 38% decrease

This author believes that the percentage of new believers in the focus group that were paying less than 10 percent was higher, but many did not answer. Again this author believes that this increase supports his original hypothesis.

The remaining surveys of the Leadership Group and the Random Membership Group have been provided for general information and to establish some baselines for the reader to consider (Appendix B).

CHAPTER SIX

REFLECTIONS, SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The Abyssinia Missionary Baptist Church in Jacksonville, Florida, is blessed to be one church in two locations. The church currently serves the north side of Jacksonville, covering the zip codes; 32208, 32209, 32218, and 32219. The church has averaged over 350 new members per year. The majority of which is between the ages of 18 to 35. Although the church's evangelism efforts appear to be working, the church's retention of new members is critically poor.

Over the past five years the church's retention rate of new believers has been less than 20 percent. As it relates to the retention of new members, it appears as if the church has a revolving door. The church has created eight New Member Orientation classes to help assimilate new members into the church. The church has about an 85 percent completion rate of new members in these classes. Once the majority of these new members receive the Right Hand of Fellowship, giving them full membership, they begin to fall away from the church. A twelve month New Member Class was created to increase the rate of retention. Although it has shown some measure of improvement, the retention rate still remains low. It appears that some of the new members were only satisfied with receiving the Right Hand of Fellowship, as if that was their primary goal. With a

confidence in their salvation and church membership, this author believes that many new members feel no need to be constantly connected to the church.

This author set-out to change the trend of attrition, in the Abyssinia Missionary Baptist Church, as it relates to young adult new believers. It was the aim of this project to increase their level of Christian commitment by reframing their understanding of salvation to include discipleship. By teaching the young adult new members that justification should never be without its partner, sanctification, and the importance of each believer being in his/her place within the body of Christ, this author hoped that they would focus more closely on their own spiritual walk. It was the author's intention, through this project, to teach young adult new believers that Christianity must be lived and understood from a *centered-set* definition and not a *fuzzy-set* definition.

The new believer should understand that he/she must have a response of obedience to Christ and his saving grace. And this obedience should lead to an eventual abandonment of self-will in favor of God's will. This allegiance to God's will, word, and work should be strongly urged in the lives of all new believers so that they will take their place in the body of Christ. The church can no longer afford to mass produce Christless Christians who choose baptism without repentance, communion without confession and a crown without a cross. It was with this thought, that this author designed this project.

The project began by having each individual in the focus group to personally assess where they were in their Christian development. This was done during the first week of the twelve week project with the completion of the discipleship surveys (see Appendix C). With an honest and clear understanding of where they were in their

spiritual walk with Christ, the curriculum—which was designed to reframe their understanding of salvation to include discipleship—was taught to them. This was accompanied by four prophetic sermons that reinforced the notion of Christian commitment/responsibility. Throughout the twelve weeks it was impressed upon the focus group that their Christian responsibility should be manifested within the church beginning in areas of evangelism, stewardship, prayer, bible study and worship service. By the completion of the twelve week project, three persons from the focus group joined the young adult ministry, two joined the choir, and one signed-up with the newly formed I. T. (information technology) ministry that manages the church's web site.

After comparing pre and post surveys, the focus group—as a whole—showed positive change in the majority of the categories polled. For example, in the category of stewardship there was a significant increase in the amount of new believers that began tithing at least ten percent (10%) of their income to the Lord. The increase of those who answered the tithing questions on the second survey was also quite significant from the first survey. Bibles study and prayer were also two categories that showed significant increase from the second survey.

This author believes that the project was successful in that it appeared to slow the rate of attrition among the new believers. Even though the hypothesis may have been proven, this author found many areas that could be improved. There were seven new believers who never finished the twelve week project. There were several more that never even showed up to the first class. There was less than 50 percent of those who received the Right Hand of Fellowship that made it to the class. Several failed attempts were made

to get these members to come to class. The class outreach worker, who herself is a young adult new member of two years, was lost after the three weeks of class. At the completion of this paper contact with the outreach worker was finally made, however she has yet to make it back to church.

This author believes that new believers should have to complete a course on discipleship and should actually begin showing signs of Christian Commitment/Responsibility before they receive the Right Hand of Fellowship. As the church continues to evangelize the world, it must focus on making disciples of new believers. This author believes that the church should reconsider granting membership to new believers without them first demonstrating some level of Christian Responsibility/Commitment in the areas of stewardship, evangelism, bible study, prayer and worship service.

Although this project did not explore it, there remains the challenge of increasing the level of Christian Commitment/Responsibility in every demographical group (new believers, non leaders, youth and young adults) in the church to the level of the baseline survey of the leaders. Others may also want to consider increasing the discipleship making process to six months, in order to better facilitate lifestyle changes that need to be made by new believers desiring to be Disciples of Christ.

It is this author's prayer that this project would be beneficial to others as they attempt to move members from casual to committed Christians.

APPENDIX A
DEMOGRAPHIC TABLES

APPENDIX A
DEMOGRAPHIC TABLES

Table 1

ABYSSINIA MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH

ZIP CODE DEMOGRAPHIC REPORT

	Total Members	Percentage of Membership
32208	696	24%
32209	1,290	45%
32218	635	22%
32219	130	5%
Other	109	4%

Table 2

ZIP CODE DEMOGRAPHIC REPORT FOR 2007

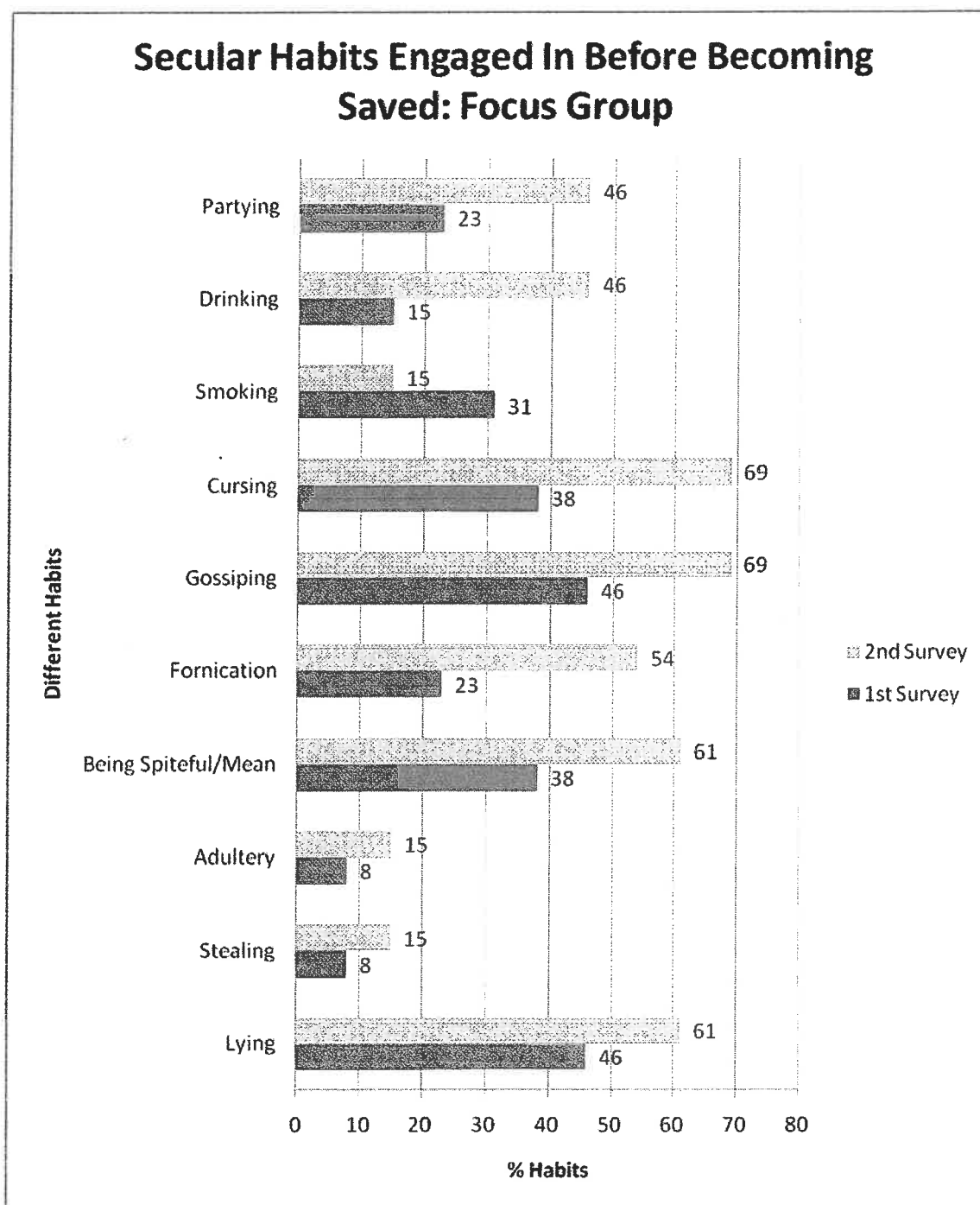
	Average Age	Average Income	Number of Households	Number of Households by 2012
32208	40	\$44,114	13,324	13,654
32209	39	\$34,026	15,180	15,481
32218	36	\$53,507	17,566	20,226
32219	40	\$49,406	4,062	4,456

APPENDIX B

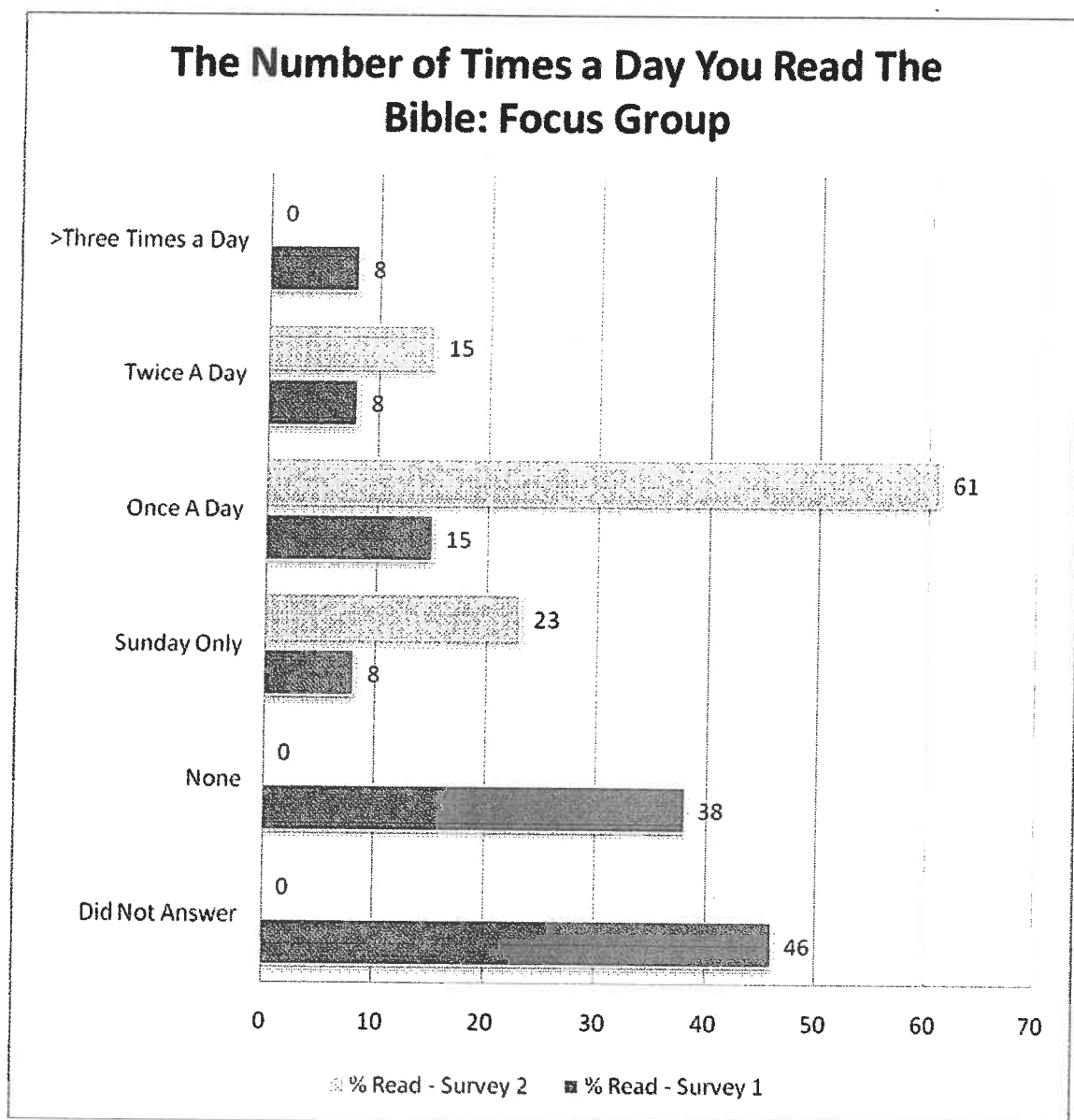
PROJECT RESULTS IN GRAPH FORM

APPENDIX B

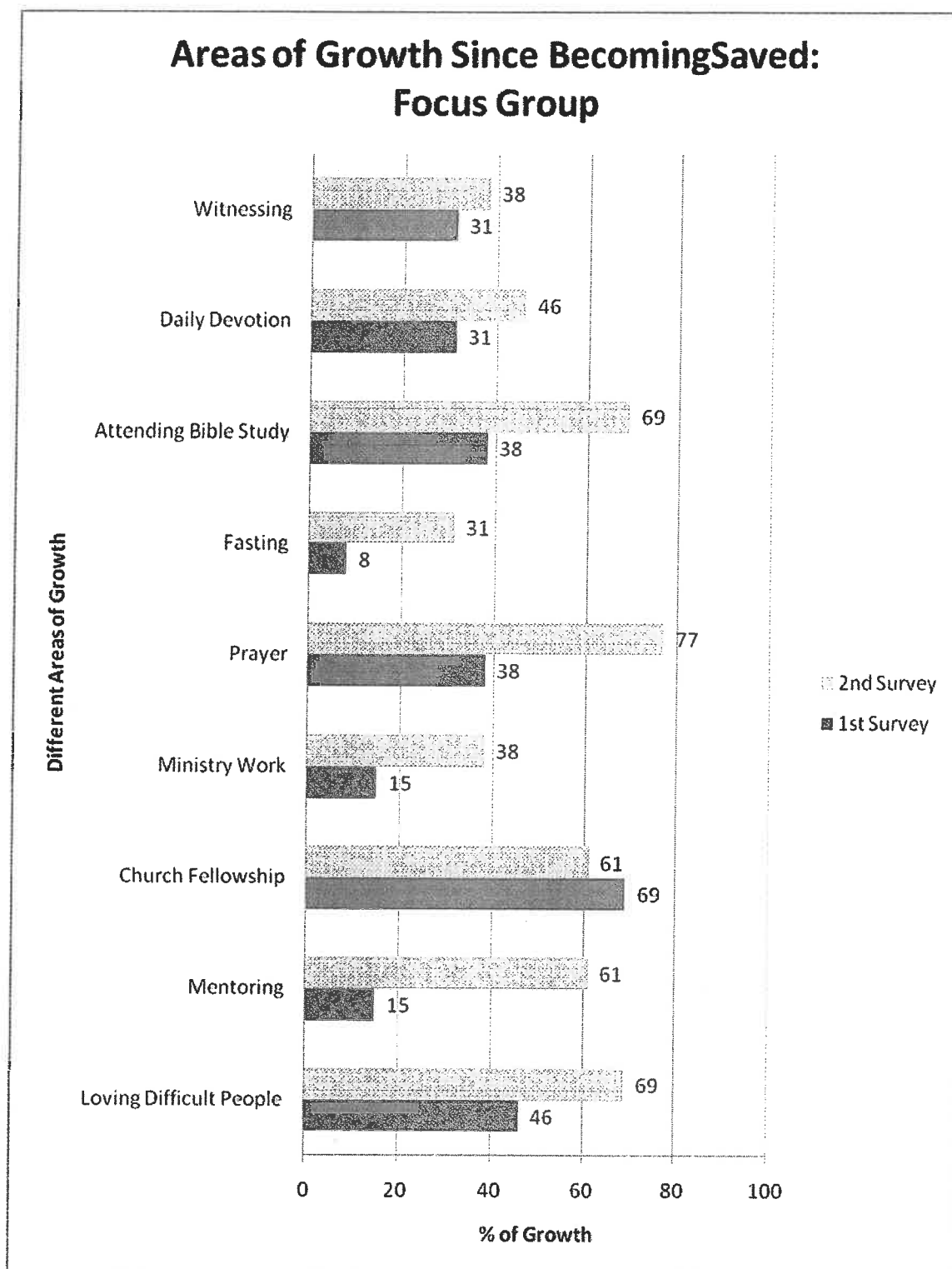
PROJECT RESULTS IN GRAPH FORM



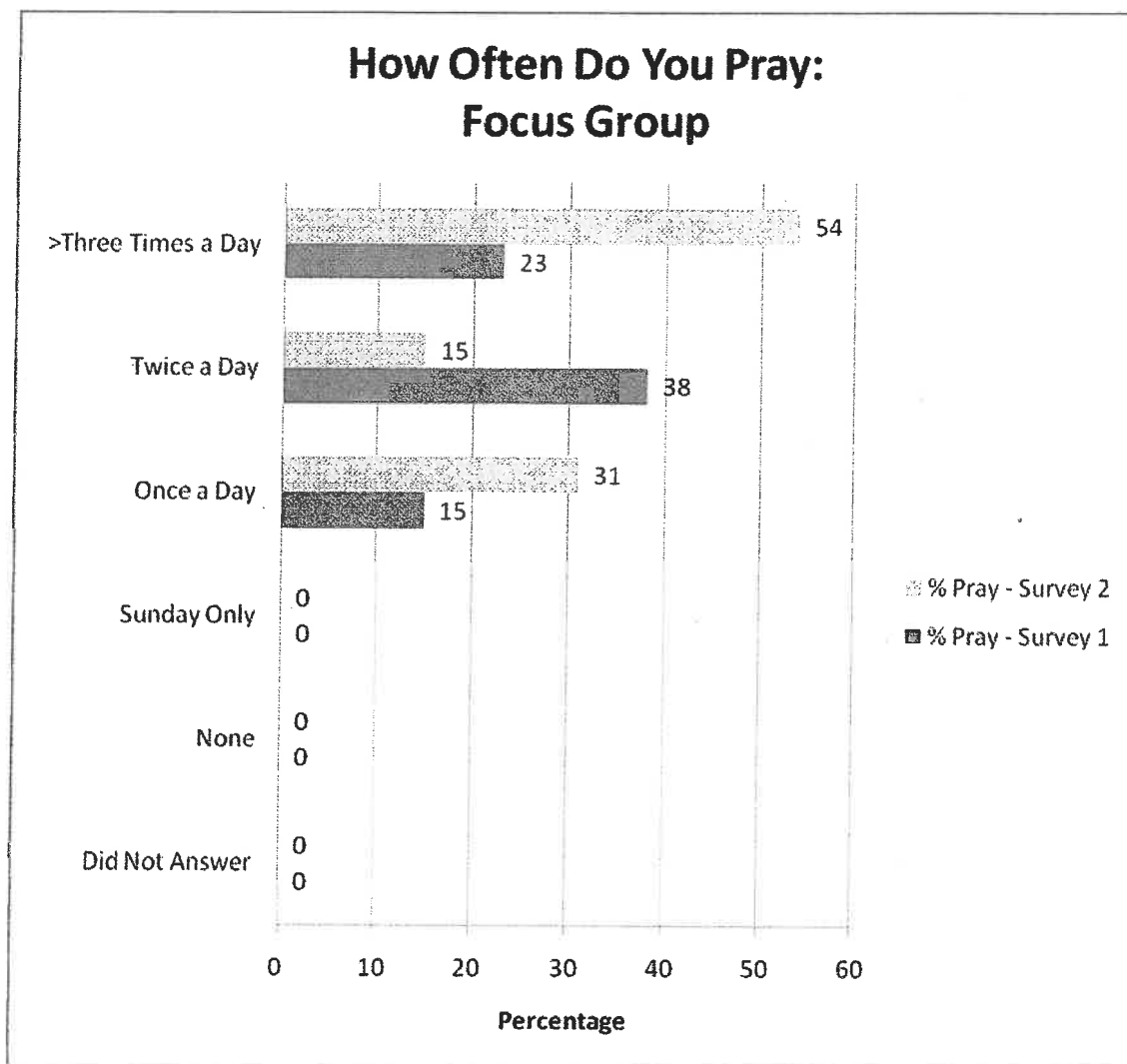
Abyssinia Missionary Baptist Church
Focus Group



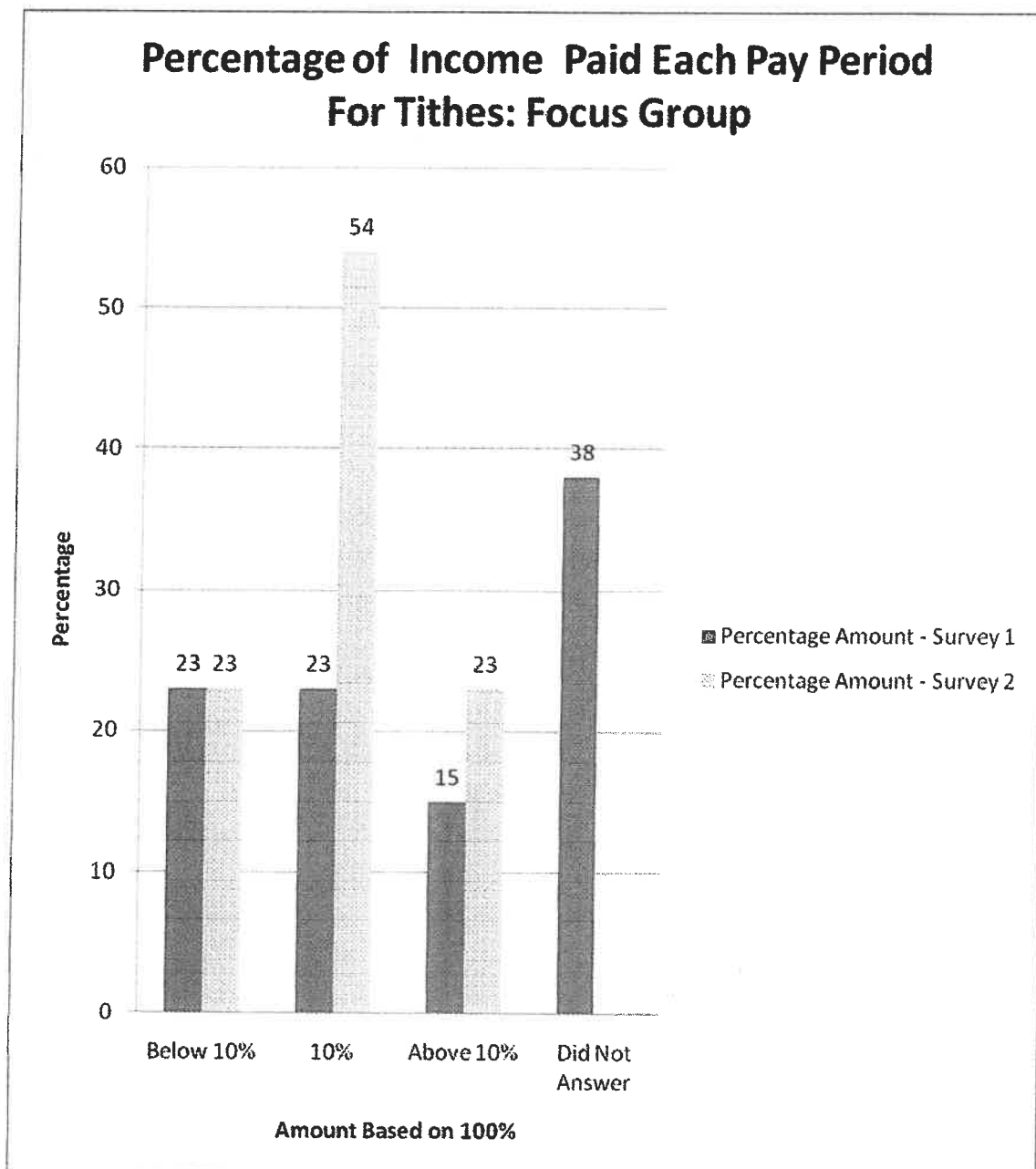
Abyssinia Missionary Baptist Church
Focus Group



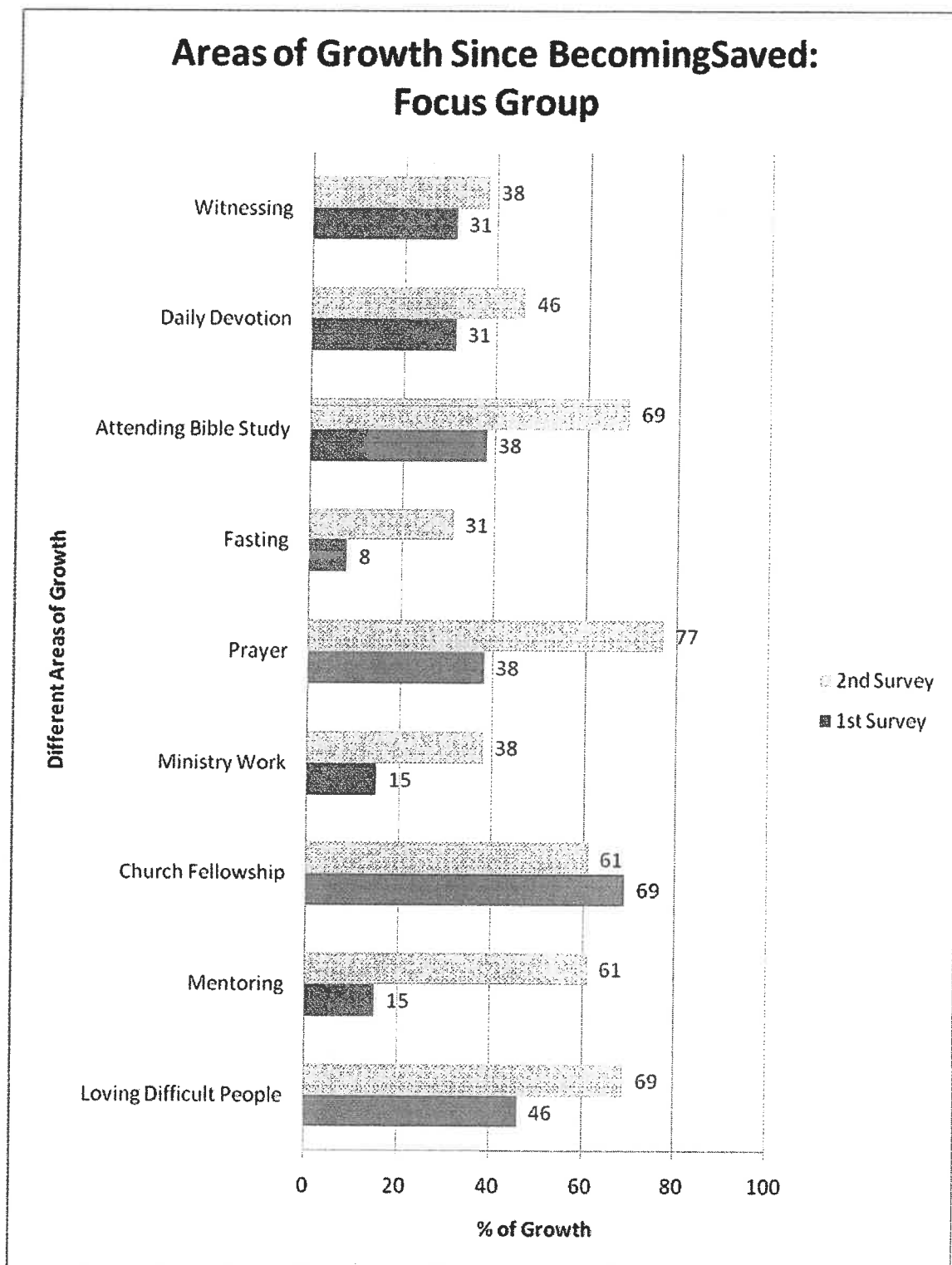
**Abyssinia Missionary Baptist Church
Focus Group**



Abyssinia Missionary Baptist Church
Focus Group

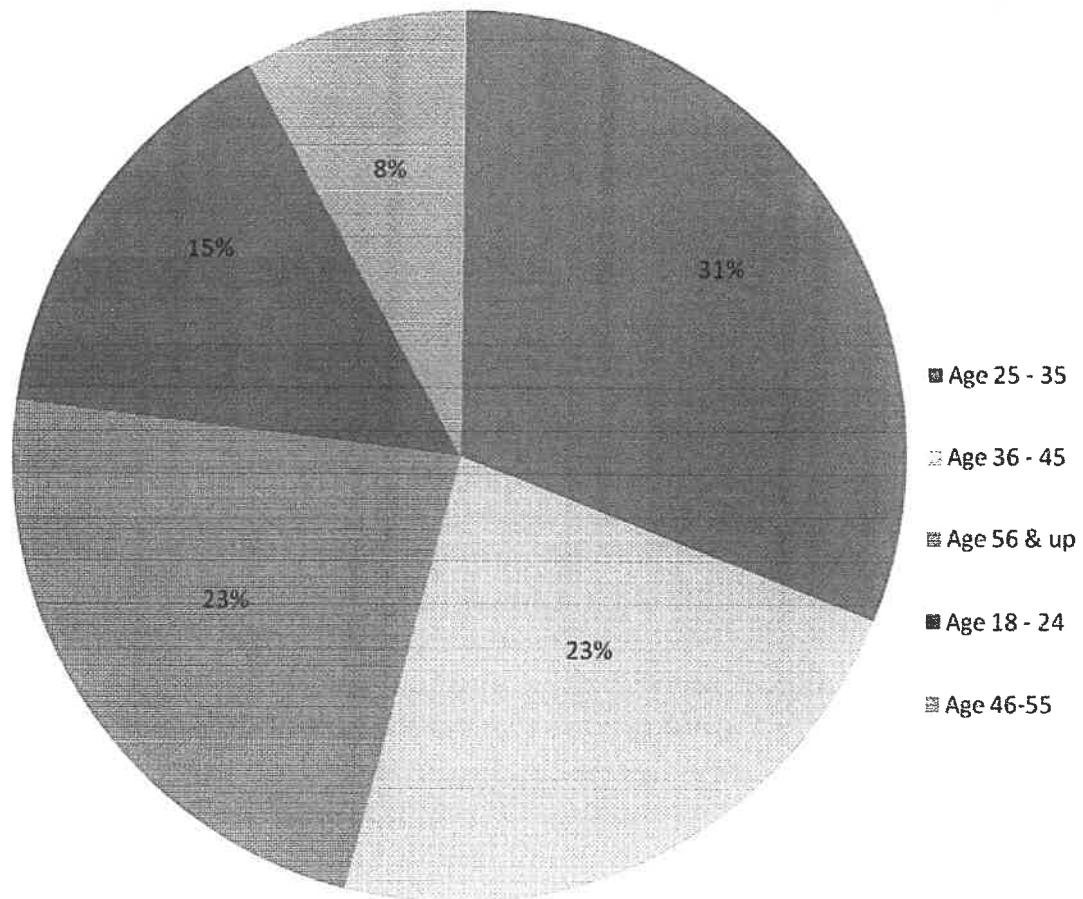


**Abyssinia Missionary Baptist Church
Focus Group**

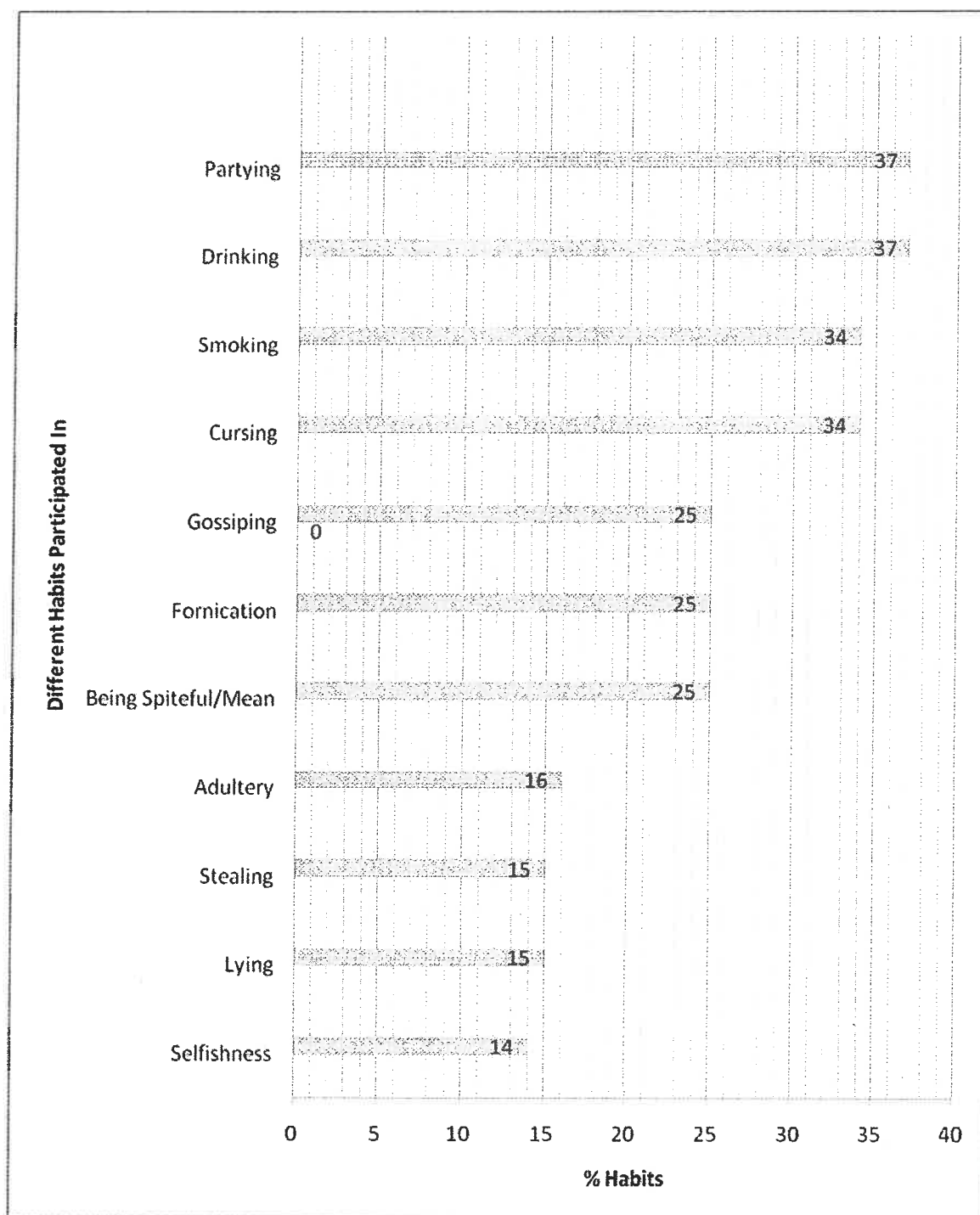


**Abyssinia Missionary Baptist Church
Focus Group**

Breakdown of Average Age For Foucus Group



Abyssinia Missionary Baptist Church
Focus Group
Secular Habits Leaders Engaged In Before Being Saved



Abyssinia Missionary Baptist Church
Leaders Group

APPENDIX C
DISCIPLESHIP SURVEY

APPENDIX C
Discipleship Survey
Form #1

Please check your age group

☐ 18-24 ☐ 25-35 ☐ 36-45 ☐ 46-55 ☐ 56 & up

1. List the sinful habits that you were doing before being saved.

<input type="checkbox"/> Drinking	<input type="checkbox"/> Lying	<input type="checkbox"/> Selfishness
<input type="checkbox"/> Smoking	<input type="checkbox"/> Partying	<input type="checkbox"/> Being Spiteful/ Mean
<input type="checkbox"/> Gossiping	<input type="checkbox"/> Fornication	<input type="checkbox"/> Stealing
<input type="checkbox"/> Cursing	<input type="checkbox"/> Adultery	

2. Check five things that you have stop doing since being saved?

<input type="checkbox"/> Drinking	<input type="checkbox"/> Lying	<input type="checkbox"/> Selfishness
<input type="checkbox"/> Smoking	<input type="checkbox"/> Partying	<input type="checkbox"/> Being Spiteful/ Mean
<input type="checkbox"/> Gossiping	<input type="checkbox"/> Fornication	<input type="checkbox"/> Stealing
<input type="checkbox"/> Cursing	<input type="checkbox"/> Adultery	
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Please explain below)		

3. Please check the areas in which you believe you have grown since being saved.

☐ Loving difficult people ☐ Ministry work ☐ Attending Bible Study
☐ Mentoring ☐ Prayer ☐ Daily devotion
☐ Church fellowship ☐ Fasting ☐ Witnessing

4. List The Ministries That You Have Served on Since Being Saved.

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____

5. Name Five Persons You Introduced To Christ?

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____

6. List The Number of Worship Services You Attend Each Month. _____

If less than four then list why:

____ Job ____ Time ____ Not Interested
____ Not fully Committed ____ Lack of Transportation

7. Check the amount of income you pay unto the Lord each pay period for tithes.

____ \$0-49 ____ \$50-99 ____ \$100-149 ____ \$150-199
____ \$200-249 ____ \$250-299 ____ \$300 & above

8. What percentage of your income does the above amount represent?

____ Below 10% ____ 10% ____ Above 10%

9. Check the number of bible study classes you attend each week (B.L. Wynn Institute, Sunday School, Hour of Power, etc.).

____ None ____ 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 or more

10. How Often Do You Read Your Bible?

____ None ____ Sunday only ____ Once a day ____ Twice a day
____ More than three times a day

APPENDIX D

SERMONS

APPENDIX D

SERMONS

Will The Real Men Please Stand Up

Ezek. 22:30 (KJV)

And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none.

Ezekiel 22:30 (HCSB)

³⁰ I searched for a man among them who would repair the wall and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land so that I might not destroy it, but I found no one.

From 1956 to 1968 there was a somewhat popular television game show hosted by Bob Stewart called, "To Tell The Truth." Since that time networks have tried to reintroduce the show to new generations in hopes of reaching former levels of success. In case you missed it, the game show would have three individuals who were similar in gender, race and age all claiming to be the same person. While a panel of celebrity guest would ask a series of question to each of the three contestants, in order to determine who the real person was. After all the questions had been asked and the celebrity guest wrote down their choice of either person #1, 2, or 3, then Bob Stewart, the host, would ask the real person to stand up. Though all three contestants would begin to stand, the two imposters would sit back down leaving the real person standing alone.

It's with this thought that we come to our text this morning with God searching for a "real man." And I know that there are some saved sisters in the sanctuary that have

been seriously searching in several spots, cities and states for the same, and like Bob Stewart, want to ask “will the real men please stand up?”

However, before studs start standing and sisters start staring there must be some qualifying questions asked. Just like the celebrity guests on the game show, there are some questions that need to be imposed in order to identify all of the imposters.

God sets the criteria in the text when He said, “*And I searched for a man among them...*”

Notice that God was looking for a **man** and not a **male**. Though every man is a male, however, not every male is a man.

And therein lays the problem. For many have mistakenly got a male and not a man. But before we pick on them, do know that some of them were fooled, because their male was made-up to look like a man. Yes age has a way of making males look like men. However, age is not a determining factor for man-hood. For God’s word would declare that there are plenty of *young-men* and *old-boys*. That’s why the Apostle Paul told Timothy,

“Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but [you] set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.” 1 Tim. 4:12 (NIV)

And in 1 Samuel 17, young David told King Saul and the rest of the army that was afraid to fight the giant, Goliath, “*I’ll go and fight this Philistine.*”

So yes, please don’t be confused by age, because there are plenty of *old-boys* and *young-men* in the world.

So how does one determine who the real men are?

Well, like the celebrity guests on the game show, we must be given some defining characteristics of what a real man is if we are going to make the right choice.

I believe that there are three characteristics that define what a real man is.

I. A Real Man Stands Out

Although this characteristic sounds simple, it is easily misleading. For many believe that real men stand out and are defined because of what they wear, what they drive or where they work. However, it's not the external things, but the internal things that define real men and make them stand out from the pretenders. Contrary to what's portrayed and promoted on T.V. and in magazines, it's not fame and fortune that define real men and make them stand out, but it's faith and fortitude.

Real men stand out because of great faith and the fortitude to use it even in the face of fear.

In Matthew 8, a centurion soldier, a non Jew, stands out when he comes to Jesus for his sick and dying servant. When Jesus agreed to go back home with him, the centurion declared that, like Jesus, he too was a man of authority, where he could tell one to go and he would go and another to come and he would come. So he told Jesus, that you don't have to come to my house, just speak the word and my servant will be healed. Jesus declared that He had never seen such faith in all of Israel. This man stands out because he had great faith.

In Genesis, Abraham doesn't stand out and become the father of the faithful, until he proves to God that God can trust him even at the cost of his son's life.

Twelve spies went into Canaan to bring back a report, but only two of them stood out, Joshua and Caleb. Because, while others were seeing giants and impossibility, their faith kept them seeing God and all the possibilities God would give them.

Over 40,000 Jews were deported to Babylon, but 4 stood out (3 in a fiery furnace, and 1 in a lions' den) [Shadrack, Meshack and Abindigo and Daniel] all because of their great faith.

Here in our text, the reason why God is searching is because there is no man that stands out. In the text God says, "I am searching for a man who might rebuild the wall of righteousness that guards the land." God says I can't find one man who has great faith enough to save Jerusalem.

Even our history is filled with men who stood out. Men like Denmark Vessey, Nat Turner, Fredrick Douglas, Benjamin Mayes, Vernon Johns, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King Jr. All men of great faith and the fortitude to use in the face of fear.

Not only does a real man stand out, but...

II. A Real Man Stands In

This is a tremendous trait that defines real men. Because real men stand in. But before they can stand in, they must first stay-in. Stay-in the family they have created. A

real man cannot be 29 years old with 21 children. If they are to Stand in they must stay-in. Stay-in the community even when you have gained enough success to move out like others. But stay-in and stand in until the community becomes a success.

Here in the Text God is searching for a man who will stand in the gap. There is a gap in the hedge/wall, and God is looking for a man who can stand in that gap. When I was growing up there was a house on the corner of our neighborhood that had a hedge around it. However, there was a gap in the hedges that everyone cut through on their way to the store. After time there became a well trenched path in the person's yard. So well trenched was the path that people who were new to the neighborhood instinctively used the path and cut through the person's yard. Everybody walked through at will, in and out of that person's yard.

Well here in the text, God has said that the Devil has too easy of an access, in and out of lives, homes and communities. So God said, "I'm looking for a man, who can stand in the gap and block the devil's access.

Well 2,000 years ago, there came a Man who stood in the gap, on a hill call Calvary. There was One, named Jesus, who stood in the gap, between sinful men and an angry God. He stood in the gap between a retched thief and a repentant sinner. In the text, here in Ezekiel, God says I searched all over for a man who could stand in the gap, but I found no one. However, "One" finally came. Down through 42 generations, born in a manger, wrapped in burial clothes....

Mary's baby, John's friend, Lazarus' second chance, the paralytic walking pal, blind man's seeing buddy, and the deaf man's hearing aid. Barabas' and our Stand In.

And one Friday night Jesus Stood In our stead, and died...

Not only does a real man, stand out, and stand in, but finally...

III. A Real Man Stands Up

The truth of the matter is that everyone falls from time to time. But the sign of a real man is if he Stands Up after he fell down. Even the righteous fall down, but they get Stand back up again. In Acts 14 the Jews stoned Paul and drug him out of the city and left him for dead. However, after the saints circled him Paul Stood Up and went back to preaching.

Real men stand back up after they've been knocked down.

That reminds me of another man...

On a Friday night our Stand In died, but thank God that every real man Stands Up again.

So on Sunday Morning, our Stand In Stood Up with all power in his Hand.

Inside, Outside:
The Challenge of The 21st Century Church

Acts 3:1-10; 4:1-4

In his autobiography, by Alex Haley, Malcolm Little, who later became Malcolm X after converting to Islam, told the account of one of his life changing moments. He stated that one Sunday morning he decided to go to church. While walking to church, Malcolm stated that he came upon some prostitutes who were selling their bodies for money and he talked with them telling them that God loved them and that they didn't have to sale themselves short like that. Then he stated a little farther down the street he saw the drug addicts getting high on door steps and the alley way. And then just across the street from the church he saw the drug dealers peddling their poison to the Blacks in the neighborhood. He stated that he stopped and talked to the drug dealers telling them how they were destroying our people just to make a buck and that they should quit their destructive behavior. He then said that he crossed the street and went into the church. Once in church he noted how hospitable the ushers were and how melodious the choir was singing, and how spirited the pastor was preaching. He watched as the congregation shouted and had such a high time in the Lord. However, Malcolm stated when he came out of the church and looked across the

street the drug dealer was still selling dope, the prostitutes were still selling their bodies and the dope addicts were still getting high. He looked back at the people in the church who were still shouting and asked himself the question: "What does *that* have to do with *this*?"

For what was happening on the **inside** of the church, had absolutely no effective change on those who were on the **outside** of the church. My brothers and sisters the challenge of the church in the 21st century remains the same. It's getting what's on the **inside** to those on the **outside**.

It's with this thought that we are ushered to our text, with a helpless brother on the outside of the church in need of what's on the inside.

I. The Contrast Is Clear

Verse 2 states that a certain lame man was laid at the temple gate called Beautiful. The gate, which scholars believe to be the Corinthian Gate (apply named for the Corinthian Bronze the gate was layered with, and trimmed in Gold and Silver), [this gate] serves as the back drop for this deformed crippled character.

Look at it. In back, an architectural masterpiece, while in front, an orthopedic mess. In back is the gate that is called Beautiful. While in front is a guy whose condition is Ugly. In back we see the Splendor of what can be. While in front we are reminded of the squalid of what is.

This contrast between Beauty and Blight depicts the ecclesiastical challenge of our time. In other words, the doors of the church are where the crisis of the community collides with the collective celebration of the Christ.

Better stated, it's where the world's problems confront God's solution. The doors of the Church serve as the threshold of change. It's there where humanity's hurts are transformed into His healing. It's there where the community's cares are relieved by the church's concerns. It's there where the calamities of the cripple are transformed by the power of the Christ.

Not only is the Contrast Clear, but the...

II. The Conditional Constraints, are clear also.

Verse 2 further reveals that the brother's crippled condition is the result of a birth defect. For he was born lame and for almost 40 years he's been living with a disadvantage. Because of his condition he was carried day after day to the **outside** [gate] of the temple, but never **inside** the temple.

Jewish tradition refused to allow anyone with a visible problem or ailment to come into the temple (the House of God). Because of traditional barriers, those who needed God the most, could not come in to His house.

Not much has changed today. For traditional barriers and pious attitudes have kept those who need God the most (drug dealers, prostitutes, transvestites and the likes)

on the outside looking in. And as a result, they have been denied access to life changing power.

The litmus test of the 21st century church is; “does it’s memberships mirror that of the community?” If there are drug dealers, prostitutes, transvestites and hustlers in the community, then there ought to be some ex-drug dealers, ex-prostitutes, ex-transvestites, ex-hustlers and such in the church.

If the church is to do effective ministry then there must be transformation within the community. For the church cannot not exist in a vacuum, within the community. The ministry on the inside must flood out to the outside. (for where ever the world is itching the church should be scratching)

The text states that the family and friends of this lame man would carry him as far as he could go (to the gate), which left him on the outside looking in. On the **inside** there is the power of God with the healing and deliverance he needs. However, He’s on the **Outside**.

If what’s on the outside can’t get in, then what’s on the inside must spill-out. The church cannot continue to be confined to the sanctuary, but must break-out and bring the life changing power of God’s word to those who don’t quite fit in the church. That brings us to...

III. The Challenge of The Cripple And The Church

The pericope presented is problematic. For the cripple is couched in front of the church. And both the church and cripple are content with each other. The text states in vs. 2 that it is at the gate that he begs for money. He is supported in his condition by those from the inside, but not changed. They provide him with what he *wants*, and he provides them with what they *need*. They enable each other.

Because of them he will never change. For he's content with just a hand-out. And because of him they will never change, for they are content with just charity.

It is a sick Symbiotic Relationship.

For the cripple needed the congregation for money. And the congregation needed the cripple for meaning. (religious meaning)

He was their Mr. Feel Good. For he gave them something to feel good about in church.

He was the stimulant for their shout. For he gave them a sense of Religiosity.

For after a week of living and letting it all hang-out, he was their last chance to do something good on their way back into the church. He is the sacrifice they needed to feel holy. However, we are reminded by Samuel, when he told Saul, that God wants obedience rather than sacrifice.

IV. The Challenge Of The Church To Change The Community

In vs. 4 he fixed his eyes on Peter and John. Thinking that they were just like the other church goers, trying to look pious on there way into church, he looked at them. He thought, by holding his hand out, that he would help give them something to feel good and shout about in the sanctuary. That like the others, they would feel happy and holy for giving a "hand-out".

However, Peter wants to offer him something more valuable than silver and gold. For Peter is not looking to enable him, but to empower him. Peter understands that this brother who is down needs to be liberated from his debilitating dilemma. Peter and John represent a new paradigm of church.

- a. It's in this new paradigm that the church gives not what the cripple wants, but what he needs.
- b. The new church must be bold enough to present a liberating Christ who can empower the down trodden.

Listen to what Peter says; *"Silver and gold have I none, but what I do have, that I give to you. In the name of Jesus, rise up and walk"*. And with an out-stretched hand Peter lifted the cripple up on his feet and out of his crippled condition. By the power of Jesus He was empowered to stand and walk-up out of his crippled condition.

You missed your shout. Not to worry for I too, missed it. For I wanted to shout off the joy of walking. And that's good. But what more important is that the brother was given the power to **Stand!**

He who has been down for almost 40 years was empowered by the name of Jesus to **STAND**.

We could conclude right here but that would be too easy. For Chapter 4 informs us that this Change in the brothers condition causes an unrest in the community with the leaders, that resulted in the arrest of the apostles Peter and John.

I want to suggest that when ministry becomes liberating those on the outside who are in charge will become upset. (e.g. Jeremiah Wright)

- i. He leaped!
 - ii. He stood!
 - iii. And He walked!
- c. But where He walked is the clincher.
 - i. Not home to his family.
 - ii. Not to the hood to his friends.
 - iii. But into the Sanctuary with his Lord.
- d. Empowered to walk out of stuff.
- e. Empowered to walk away from folk.

Walk around heaven.

From Worship To Work:
The Progression of A Christian

Mark 6:7-13

One of the world's greatest phenomena's is salvation. The thought that after all we've done, God still looked beyond all of our faults and saved us from death and destruction to a wonderful life with Him is still quite amazing. Some of us (not everybody, but some of us) were living lives that were spiraling out of control and no matter how hard we tried we couldn't pull out and save ourselves, but thanks be to God we met Jesus and He did what others said couldn't be done. And as a result there are some saved folk in here who can testify that the only reason they have made it this far is because they have had some of what I call, "But Jesus" moments in their lives.

- Should have been dead, But Jesus.
- Never be drug free, But Jesus.
- Not college material, But Jesus.
- Never will make it as a single parent, but Jesus.
- Never amount to anything, but Jesus.

If it had not been for my "But Jesus" moments, I would not have made it to where I am now.

There ought to be enough people in here to celebrate the fact that God looked beyond our faults and saw our needs.

However, now that we've been saved there are some things that God intends for us to do. For the life of a Christian cannot be defined by just sitting on the premises and waiting on the promises. For God intends for us to move from *shouting to serving*, from *worship to work*.

In the text that is before us, the disciples are now moving from the theoretical to the practical. In other words, they are transitioning from theory to practice. Jesus has decided that it is now time for them to move from the classroom to the community and from the sanctuary to the streets. For every Disciple of Christ must fulfill the Duty of His Kingdom.

As believers, we too are expected to fulfill the duties of the Kingdom. Christ expects us to move from worship to work. The totality of one's discipleship should never be limited to just the sanctuary. For we are informed within the church, in order to transform those outside of the church. But if what's in here never spills out there, the world, along with the believers, can never be changed. That's why Jesus had them put in to practice the things He taught.

I. The Believers Are Called To the Savior.

Vs. 7 says that "He called the twelve to Himself..."

A. Notice the Direction of The Call.

The text states that they were called "*to him*", which suggest that they were called *from* somewhere else. Which means that if you came to Him, there are some

places and things that you have left behind. His calling us to Him is also His calling us from something else. You shouldn't get here and act like you weren't called out of some stuff.

B. Notice the Diversity of the Crowd.

The disciples were made up of individuals with various and asunder backgrounds. As a matter of fact, Jesus was criticized because he did not go to the seminary and synagogue to select his disciples. But he selected those other would have rejected. The glory of the divine Call, is that he chose us. Not because we were qualified, but because we were cleared. We should have been disqualified and discounted, but because of His grace we've been mad Disciples.

The believers are not only called to the Savior, but...

II. The Believers Are Commissioned By the Savior.

In vs. 7b. the text says "that He sent them out, two by two, and gave them power over unclean spirits."

As commissioned believers we have received power and authority.

A. Apostolic Power

The word "send" in the Greek is "apostellein". They received Apostolic Power. It is a going power. In other words it is not manifested or realized unless and until the believer goes in their calling. In other words it doesn't work much in the church. It's the same power that Jesus gives in the great commission when He said "Go ye

therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost..." Most believers have failed to exercise this power because they have yet to go in their calling.

B. Authoritative Power.

This power goes hand and hand with the apostolic power. This is the power that backs-up and certifies the message of Christ. This is the power that enables the believer to do signs and wonders to back-up the gospel message we preach/teach. Not only are the believers called to the Savior and commissioned by the Savior, but...

III. The Believers Receive Commands From the Savior.

In vs. 8-11 Jesus give them the parameters for their ministry.

He gives them parameters on what to Preach, how to Pack and when to Part. They preached what He preached. Verse 12 states that hey preached that men should repent. They stayed true to the same word they had received from the Savior. Preach/teach/tell what you have learned from the word of God. Not your opinion but God's word.

They packed what He commanded them to pack. Jesus did not want them to take all the things they would need to stay on the mission field. He wanted them to put their trust in God and not in their supply.

They parted as he instructed.

GO AWAY JESUS
WHEN YOU PUT THE LORD OUT

**Mark 5:17 ...and the crowd began pleading
with Jesus to go away and leave them alone. (New Living)**

In this day and time of freedom of speech and religion it's almost hard to imagine folk telling Jesus to go away. With superstars giving Him a shout-out every time they win something or the camera shines their way and people wearing fashionable "What Would Jesus Do" jewelry and out-fits it's hard to believe that in a time like this Jesus could be sent away. In an era when there seems to be a church on every corner and an evangelist on every other channel it's difficult to digest the notion that there could be some folk who really want Jesus to vacate their facilities and leave them alone.

As unrealistic as it might seem, there is a growing populace that would prefer no interference on the part of Jesus in their lives. And before you jump to conclusions and believe that it's only the unsaved I'm referring to, I beg to differ with you. It's not the unsaved folk but the so-called saved ones that I'm talking about. No, it's not the ones who never let Him in, but the ones who supposedly let Him in, but act as if they want Him to leave back out. Yeah they have bumper stickers that say "Jesus is my Co-pilot", but be

careful not to cut them off in traffic, for they'll kick Jesus to the curb and curse you out from Amazing Grace to A Floating Opportunity.

Yeah from the onset it looks good to have Jesus in your life to save you from dangers, diseases and destruction. For everybody wants Him as Savior, however it's Him being the Lord of our lives that most folk can't handle. By all means we want Him to show up and feed us when we're hungry, comfort us when we're lonely and heal us when we're sick. But after that we'd rather He go and live with someone else. For truth be told, this Jesus has a history for being an annoying house guest, a neighborhood nuisance, and a community calamity. Just let Him go home with you, and you'll discover that He's like a visiting grandmother, that won't sit down until the whole house is clean. Once in, He'll start throwing out stuff you've paid good money to bring in. Stuff like your good bottles of Crown Royal, Grand Marnier and Cavarasiay; your HBO and your Skinamax, and those websites you look at when everybody has gone to bed. He has a way of coming in and throwing out the very stuff we've struggled so hard to get in. Once He's finished throwing out stuff that you wanted to keep in, He'll turn around and bring in people and things you wanted to keep out. Like love, compassion, long suffering, and forgiveness. Then He'll let in people, like

crazy kids and homeless folk. If you aren't careful, He'll keep inviting hurting humanity to your doorstep, in need of a helping hand. If you keep Jesus and leave Him in your house too long, you'll look up and the next thing you know there will be troubled teens at your door seeking Godly advise and direction.

Yeah it's issues about His Lordship that makes people desire to see Him go. However, this isn't anything new. It's been like this since the bible days. So our society is not the first in trying to get rid of Jesus. The biblical record states that folk have been doing that since before He arrived. Waiting for years with anxious anticipation of His coming, only to hang out a sign when He finally arrived that said "No Room in The Inn". No, we aren't the only ones who invited Him in on Sunday with raised hands shouting "Hosanna in the Highest" and then traded Him in for another man on Friday.

Yes, we don't mind if blind eyes hear Him coming and begin to see what He's saying. Or if deaf ears see Him teaching and hear what He really means. Or if lame legs see Him coming and hear what He says and as a result fall in step with His step and begin to walk in His will and after His way.

Folk don't mind that. But it's when He disrupts and challenges the social, economic, and political structures of our society that make folk beg Him to go away and leave them alone. He's all right when he's healing and feeding folk. However, it's when He says stuff like: "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done" – that's when we decide "that Joker's got to go." For the biblical record shows that whenever someone challenges the social, economic, political and religious structures of a society, that person is done away with. (eg. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.)

That brings us to our text, with a town of people begging Jesus to go away and leave them alone.

Well if you missed it, something great and miraculous has just occurred. For a brother has been completely delivered from all of his demonic devices. What an awesome miracle this was. Greater than a blind man receiving his sight or a lame man being made to walk again; this brother has been delivered from a dominating demonic system that kept his mind muddy, his family fractured and his community crippled. The demonic devices that kept this brother going in and out of the county lock-up have finally been done away with by the power of Jesus.

Mark, the gospel writer, describes this brother as a crazy man who resided in a dead community, in a town whose economy was design to profit off of the demonic devices and disasters of others. In other words, what we see here in Gadarea, is a society whose best interest is to keep folk crazy, locked-up and living in dead communities so that the society can prosper.

Look at it. In verse 15, Mark reports, that after those who saw the brother delivered and the pigs drowned went and brought back the city officials and the people from down town and they saw the brother sitting there with Jesus fully dressed and in his right mind they became afraid.

It was this verse that made me wonder what was is it about this young man that scared the movers and shakers of the city. And after looking at it for a while I discovered two (2) things that frightened them about this liberated brother: 1) His present predicament and 2) his promising potential. First, his present predicament frightened them because he was no longer predictably crazy and controllable.

For the first time, this brother no longer fits their stereotypical ideology. He no longer looks the part of a crazy thug. **Look at it.** The text says that he was dressed and in his right mind. No longer did he look like the thug with his pants hanging down off his butt and shirt all open and out of

his pants. But now he's learned how to dress for success. And as a result the town people are scared for they realize that once you start looking like somebody, you'll soon start acting like somebody and after while you'll demand that everybody start treating you like somebody.

Not only that, but he was "sitting," which is a posture of learning. Meaning no longer is the secret of knowledge safe within books. Sure they're scared now because an educated man is a dangerous man. Because they know, if you free his mind, his body will soon follow.

The text states that even though he broke his chains and freed himself from the tombs, time after time, he kept coming back to the tombs. For his body was free but his mind was enslaved. But now his mind has been freed. And that means it doesn't matter if he is in the middle of a dead community, for if his mind is no longer shackled to dead hopes and dreams he will discover life changing knowledge that can revive not only himself but also a dead community.

The town folk are scared because they know that knowledge is power, and if dead communities get power, the dope sales will disappear, the liquor stores will dry-up and the community revitalization will begin.

Finally, the second reason why the city official got scared of the brother was because of his promising potential.

The brother has great potential. We know this because of his history. For the text tells us that even though the brother was going in and out of lock-up because of the demonic devices in his life, he still managed to ascend to great heights. In other words, no matter how much hell was going on in his life, the brother still managed to accomplish somethings. And if he could do all of that while being debilitated by demonic forces, now that he's been delivered... "Eyes have not seen, Ears have not heard, neither has it entered into the hearts and minds of folk, what great things the Lord has in store for [him]."

You missed it!

Some of the hardest working business men in this country work on the corners in the hood. Don't fool yourself, and write them off. They know the economic principal of supply and demand, and are capable of doing algorithms in their head. Where else can you find dedicated businessmen who will work till 4:00 in the morning, stand in heat, rain and snow just to keep products moving. Endure hostile take-overs in the form of drive by

shootings and report back to work on time the next day. These brothers have unlimited potential.

No wonder they scare the heck out of folk.

And finally I know that his potential is great for one more reason.

He met Jesus, the "Storm Chaser".

It's this Jesus, who with a word, **shalom**, snatched the fight out of the wind and the anger from the sea and caused the disciples to wonder "what manner of man is this?".

It's this Jesus, who with a look, could deflate the elevated egos of the city's elite, while creating a character of confidence in one who once was crazy.

It's this Jesus, who dares to disrupt a crazy community that's more concern with the profit from pigs than the potential of people.

It's this Jesus, who is a menace to every society that would dare to put swine before souls, profit before people and oil before soldiers. War before Health Care.

Go away Jesus!

Thanks be to God that he met Jesus. And while others might want to send Him away, this man realized that he needs Jesus, everyday.

APPENDIX E
DISCIPLESHIP LESSONS

APPENDIX E

DISCIPLESHIP LESSONS

THE CHURCH

The purpose of this lesson is to give the student a biblical understanding of the church, from its foundation to its formation and its function.

Student Questions:

1. Who is the founder of the Church?
2. What is the foundation of the Church?
3. Who owns the Church?
4. How does a person become a part of the Church?
5. Can other denominations (eg. Methodist, Pentecostal, etc.) be apart of the Church?
6. As a part of the Church, what is my primary goal?

The Foundation of The Church

Study:

Matthew 16:13-20 (KJV)

When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? [14] And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. [15] He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? [16] And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. [17] And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but

my Father which is in heaven. [18] And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. [19] And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. [20] Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.

In Matthew 16:13 Jesus asked His disciples who other people thought He was. They answered that some thought Jesus was one of the old prophets reincarnated and some thought that he was a new prophet on the scene. There are still people today who think that Jesus was a prophet. They are willing to credit Him with being a holy man, a man of God, and even a prophet, but that is as far as they are willing to go. The Jews, Muslims and Jehovah Witnesses are just some of the people who will not go beyond calling Jesus a holy man, man of God or even a prophet.

In verse 15 Jesus asked His disciples who they thought that He was. Simon Peter answered and said **“you are the Christ, Son of the Living God.”** Jesus called Peter blessed for his ability to see beyond the physical and see Him for who He is; Christ, the Son of God. It is upon this confession that Jesus states He will build His Church.

In verse 18 Jesus says that Peter’s confession of Him being Christ, the Son of God, is the **rock** (or foundation) on which His Church shall be built.

Note that the founder and owner of the Church is Jesus. Also notice that the foundation of the Church is Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

The word “church” appears for the first time in the bible here in verse 18. In the Greek text the word “church” is “ekklesia,” which means a called out body of believers (who believe and confess that Jesus Christ, the Son of God is Lord). With this said then the Church is a called out body of believers founded on Jesus Christ. The church building is

not the Church. It is the place where the Church meets to worship God. As individual believers we make up the Church.

The Formation of The Church

Study:

Read Acts 2:1-47

The formation of the Church is further defined in chapter 2 of Acts with the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost in an upper room in Jerusalem. As promised by Jesus Christ, when His followers/believers (about 120) were in one place and on one accord the Holy Spirit came in like a mighty rushing wind and filled the room and then them. It was after this that everyone in Jerusalem heard the gospel (Jesus Christ crucified buried and resurrected) in their own language. Peter preached and explained what was going on and that Jesus was the Christ who wicked men had crucified, but God raised Him from the dead three days later. The bible says that after hearing Peter preach, about 3,000 people were baptized (upon their confession of faith in Jesus Christ) and added to the Church. From that moment to now God has been adding people to His Church. The sharing of the gospel story to those who are not saved (un-believers) is the primary purpose of the Church. This is the fulfillment of the Great Commission given by Christ Jesus to every called out believer/follower (the Church).

The Function of The Church

The Great Commission

Study:

Read Matthew 28:18-20 (KJV)

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. [19] Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: [20] Teaching them to observe all

things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

When it comes to the function or purpose of the Church one should look no further than the founder of the Church. Jesus Christ commissioned the Church to spread the gospel, baptize believers and teach them how to live according to the word of God. In Acts 1:8 Jesus tells **every believer** to spread the gospel first at home with those you are related to, then a little further out to people you know at work, school or in the neighborhood, and finally on to the strangers throughout the world. The confession of Jesus Christ as Lord and the sharing/spreading of the gospel is the **primary duty/ministry** of every called out believer of Christ Jesus.

The Apostle Paul in Ephesians 4:11-13 states that God gave [the Church] Pastor/teachers for the equipping of believers for the **primary duty/ministry**, so that the Body of Christ (the Church) can be built up. It is the obligation of every believer to spread/share/preach the gospel to every un-saved person. This is the great commission of Christ.

Notes: _____

EARLY CHURCH HISTORY

The purpose of this lesson is to give the student a general understanding of the Church's early history which will enable each student to better appreciate the modern day Church and their role in it.

Student Questions:

1. Why did the Church need deacons?
2. What is the primary role of the Apostles (pastors)?
3. Who was the first martyr of the Church?
4. Who persecuted the early Church?
5. Who was Constantine and what did he do for the Church?
6. Should the Church have allowed those who left the faith in order to stay alive, to return after the persecution of the Church was over? Why or Why not?

Study:

Read Acts 6:1-15

The early church in Jerusalem, which is often idealized and believed to be the perfect model of the ecclesia, actually, when examined closer, was struggling with some major issues. The Apostle Peter, who appeared to be committed to the spread of the gospel, had serious hang-ups on accepting gentiles. While the Jerusalem church is highlighted by Luke for sharing their possessions in order to have “all things in common,” it is soon revealed that there is strife because one group in the church is being neglected. In order to deal with the two factions in the church (**Hellenists** {Greek speaking Jews} and **Hebrews** {Hebrew speaking Jews}) the Apostle had the church members to select 7 men “to serve tables.” These men, who had already demonstrated honesty and high levels of spirituality, were placed into positions as deacons to assist the Apostles (pastors) in serving the church. In chapter 7 of Acts Stephen, one of the seven, becomes the first martyr of the Christian church for standing before the Jewish council and speaking wisdom that even the Jewish scholars could not debate. Philip, another one of the seven deacons, would go on to found a church in Samaria outside of the confines

of Judea. Not only were the first deacons examples of dedicated disciples committed to Christ, but there would soon be many more.

During the persecution of the Christians by the Roman Empire many Christians went the way of Stephen and became martyrs for the testimony of Jesus Christ. Up until about the 4th century many disciples were determined like Daniel not to be deterred by the threat of being devoured by wild beast and proudly became martyrs for the testimony of Jesus Christ. The Greek word “μαρτυς” (martyr) from which we derive our English word “martyr” literally means “witness” in a legal sense.¹ A “martyr” is a witness who is willing to die for his/her testimony of Jesus Christ. Christians living under Roman authority were often given laws that contradicted with the laws of God. One such law was the profession of Caesar as lord and death to those who would not make such a declaration upon request. As a result many Christians held true to their faith and lost their lives as they cried out “κύριος Χριστός” (Christ is Lord).

At the turn of the 4th century Christians showed their level of discipleship to Christ by refusing to fight in the military. Caesar Galerius, under Augustus Diocletian’s rule, had all of the Christians kicked out of the military. Though it was not intended to be a hostile gesture, Galerius’ army in Danube executed the Christian they put out. After this in A.D. 303 Galerius convinced Augustus Diocletian to order all Christians removed from government positions and all Christian literature, artifacts and even churches destroyed. Galerius accused Christians of setting fire to his imperial palace and as a result Diocletian ordered all Christians to offer sacrifices to the gods. Although his wife and daughter, who were Christians, made sacrifices to the gods, the Grand Chamberlain, Dorotheus, and several other Christians refused and suffered martyrdom. Under Diocletian’s rule the church suffered the most severe persecution in its history. During this period many Christians were begged by their friends, family and former Christians to abandon their faith so their lives would be spared. While some gave in and abandoned their faith many others went to their death as dedicated disciples of Christ.

¹ Walter Baur, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 494.

After becoming deathly sick, Galerius wanted the Christians to pray to God to heal him. So he decreed that all persecution of Christians be stopped and begged them to return to their religious practices of Christianity. With Galerius' decree the worst persecution in the history of the church was ended. However, Galerius died five days later and the Empire was divided among Licinius, Maximinus Daia, Constantine and Maxentius. However, Constantine would eventually become the sole Roman Emperor. With the reign of Constantine and the making of Christianity a religion of the State, persecution of the Christians by Rome ceased.

The marriage of Church and State, though welcomed at the onset, quickly changed from what seemed to be a blessing into what now appeared to be a curse. Now that persecution appeared to be a thing of the past people were becoming Christians at an alarming rate. The church historian, Justo Gonzalez, said that "the narrow gate of which Jesus had spoken had become so wide that countless multitudes were hurrying past it – some seemingly after privilege and position, without caring to delve too deeply into the meaning of Christian baptism and life under the cross."² With the church having such a large influx of "so-called" new believers and the massive returns of those who abandoned their faith to avoid persecution, the percentage of dedicated disciples were low. Faced with a church that had become married to the things of the world and Christians who were preoccupied with the pursuit of luxury more than the priorities of the Lord, faithful Christians began to turn to the monastic life.

Towards the end of the 4th century many Christians decided that the best way to remain or become a dedicated disciple of Christ was to seek life within the monastery. In the monastery believers could live a life free from the pressures placed upon them by the things of the world. There, at the monastery, the Christians could commit all of their time, talent and resources to the Lord. For many years the monastic life served as the counter balance to the loose lifestyle of many Christians.

² Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity, Volume 1 The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation* (New York: HarperCollins, 1984), 136.

Even though the monastic lifestyle was a great plus for the church, it did however have some flaws. One such flaw was the isolation of the monasteries which did not afford the monks to come in contact with those needing to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus' intent was for His followers to be in the world but not of the world. For it's in the world that Christ sends us out to advance the kingdom of God and make a difference in the world. Another flaw with the monasteries was that those who joined turned all of their possession over to the monastery and as a result the monasteries became rich and even owned large territories of land which lead to their corruption. Finally the monasteries became prize possessions for kings and politicians who wanted their children and friends to control territories and become bishops. Monarchs and those of high nobility often had their illegitimate offspring made abbots and abbesses without any form of Christian commitment.

Student Questions:

1. Though we live in a country in which we have freedom of religion, but if we did not, would you be willing to die for your testimony of Jesus Christ?
2. Do you believe we as Christians today have an easier task of witnessing for Jesus than those in the early Church?
3. Do you feel that every Christian should have to endure some type of difficulty or suffering for the cause of Christ?

Study:

Read John Matthew 16:24 (KJV)

Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

CHURCH HISTORY: THE REFORMATION

The purpose of this lesson is to give the student a general understanding of the Church's history from the 15th century to the present. This should give the student a working knowledge of the Catholic church and the various Protestant churches.

Student Questions:

1. What caused the split of the Catholic church?
2. What are indulgences and are they biblical?
3. What is grace?
4. Who is Martin Luther and what did he do?
5. Who were the Anabaptist?

Study:

By the end of the 14th century the church had fallen under the control of abbots, priest, bishops, archbishops and popes with emperors who were more carnal than Christian. At the turn of the 15th century those who were devoted disciples for Christ were few. Justo Gonzalez highlighted the problems with the church when he asked, "How could a priest resist corruption in his parish, when he himself had been forced to buy his position? And how could the laity trust a sacrament of penance administered by a clergy that seemed to have no sense of the enormity of sin?"³ Even the good priest struggled to remain faithful in the Catholic Church that was corrupt on so many levels. It was becoming increasingly clearer that the church was in need of reforming. Probably the final straw was when Pope Leo X cut a deal to sale Albert of Brandenburg the position of archbishop for the sum of 10,000 ducats. Because of the large amount of money needed, the pope gave Albert permission to run a sale on indulgences (price paid for forgiveness

³ Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity, Volume 2, The Reformation to the Present Day* (New York: HarperCollins, 1985), 7.

of sins) and split half the proceeds so Pope Leo X could have enough money to build the great basilica in Rome. ⁴

After the birth of the protestant reformation with Martin Luther and his 95 Theses, Christians began returning back to the earlier teachings of Christianity and back to being dedicated disciples for Christ. No longer following the corrupt practices that the Catholic Church had become known for, Christians began holding up a standard of righteousness.

Ulrich Zwingli was the great protestant reformer from whom the Anabaptist movement started. Once Zwingli's teachings could not be disputed by the bishopric the church broke away from the Catholic church and Rome. Zwingli's main goal was to restore biblical faith and practice among the Christians in Zurich. Different from Luther and the Christians in Germany, the Swiss Christians with Zwingli insisted on only doing those things that were found in the bible. This gave rise to Christians insisting on being baptized again since there is no biblical record of child baptism. The re-baptizers or Anabaptist believed that baptism should only occur when individuals profess their faith. Because of the threat this posed to the Catholic Church the Anabaptist were persecuted; some drowned and others killed.

From the Anabaptist movement came a Dutch Catholic priest named Menno Simons who joined in 1536. His followers would be known as Mennonites. ⁵ These were believers who were characterized by their strict adherence to the bible, especially the teaching of Christ found in His sermon on the Mountain. They obeyed civil authorities as long as what was required of them did not conflict with God's holy word. They lived lives that were totally devoted to Christ. They were later persecuted because they refused to join or fight in the military. Like the pilgrims who sought to escape persecution in the "new world", the Mennonites also fled to the Americas to get away from persecution.

Once in America the Mennonites would break off into a couple of new sects. One sect would become Quakers. The Quakers kept with the biblically based lifestyle of the Mennonites and the Anabaptist. They were highly devoted to the things of God. It was

⁴Ibid., 21.

⁵Ibid., 59.

only natural that there dedicated discipleship to Christ placed them in opposition to slavery. History records that many of the abolitionist who participated with the Underground Railroad were Quakers. Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries they exhibited a high level of Christian responsibility while many of their White counterparts chose to profit from human chattel instead of living a life of love like Christ.

The Quakers were not the only ones who had a Christian mindset and lifestyle that opposed the institution of slavery. In 1832 the New England Society was formed. This was an anti-slavery group that demanded an attitudinal change on the part of churches toward the challenge of slavery. In February 1836 the Rhode Island Anti-Slavery Convention claimed “that the people have a right to expect of the ministers of Christ that they will cheerfully engage in the work of abolition, and to call upon them to proclaim the truth on this subject, as those who are bound to declare the counsel of God.”⁶ They held unreservedly, that “so far as moral means are concerned the system of American slavery is now sustained chiefly through the influence of the pulpit.”⁷ The southern clergy, especially the Southern Baptist, reacted sharply to the position that was being held by Northern Baptist.⁸

Finally in closing this historical recitation of a few devoted disciples, this author would be remiss if he failed to highlight Andrew Bryan and the First Colored Baptist Church in Savannah, Georgia, which is the oldest Black Baptist Church in America (organized January 20, 1788). Andrew Bryan and every member of his church were constantly persecuted by Whites for their faith and commitment to serving God. Rev. James Simms wrote an account of their sufferings.

Frequent, then, became the whipping of individual members by patrol on the plea of not having proper tickets-of-leave, which finally culminated in the arrest and punishment of a large part of the members, all of whom were severely whipped;

⁶Charles Octavia Boothe, *The Cyclopedia of the Colored Baptist of Alabama: Their Leaders and Their Works* (Birmingham, AL: Alabama Publishing Company, 1895), 22-23.

⁷Ibid., 28.

⁸Leroy Fitts, *A History of Black Baptist* (Nashville TN: Broad Press, 1985), 27.

but Rev. Andrew Bryan, their pastor, and his brother, Sampson Bryan, one of the first deacons, were in-humanly cut, and their backs were so lacerated that their blood ran down to the earth, as they, with uplifted hands, cried unto the Lord; and this first negro Baptist pastor, while under this torture, declared to his persecutors that he rejoiced not only to be whipped, but will freely suffer death for the cause of Christ.”⁹

Despite all of the brutal and un-Godly treatment they received, they never abandoned their faith in God or their Church. Their resolve and their continual devoted commitment to Christ were eventually recognized and honored with a certificate for becoming an official Christian church. The certificate read:

This is to certify that upon examination into the experiences and characters of a number of the Ethiopians [not Blacks] at and adjacent to Savannah, it appears that God has brought them out of Darkness into the light of the Gospel, and given them fellowship one with the other; believing that it is the will of Christ, we have constituted them a Church of Jesus Christ, to keep his worship and ordinances. January 19, 1788.” Signed, A. Marshall, V.D.M.¹⁰

DISCIPLESHIP PRINCIPLES

Just as every part of the human body has a specific purpose or role to aid in the mobility and the function of an individual, so does every member/person of the Body of Christ have a specific purpose or role to aid in its function. The purpose of this lesson is to define the Christian responsibility of every believer. Simply put, this lesson deals with one’s discipleship to Christ.

⁹Jeffrey R. Brackett, *The Negro in Maryland: A Study of the Institution of Slavery* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University, 1889), 177.

¹⁰“The Baptist and Slavery,” *Social Science Quarterly*, (December 1968), Vol. 49, No. 3, 667.

Student Questions:

1. What role does discipleship play in salvation?
2. What is Justification?
3. What is Sanctification?
4. What two terms make up discipleship?

Study:

Mark 10:17-23 (KJV)

And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? [18] And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God. [19] Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother. [20] And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth. [21] Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me. [22] And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions.

[23] And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!

In Mark 10:17-23 Jesus is approached by a rich young ruler who asked Him the universal question “how can I live forever (get to heaven)?” Jesus told him to follow the Commandments. To which the young man replied from his youth up that he had kept the Commandments. “I don’t drink, I don’t smoke, I have never committed adultery or stolen anything.” In a nut shell the young man said that he has been living a morally correct life. However, Jesus cut to the heart of his problem and told him to sell off all that had, give the money to the poor, and come and follow Him. These three things stood between the young man and eternal life. I believe the young man looked at his portfolio and tallied-up his 401K’s, all of his stock options, his rental properties, his summer and winter vacation homes and all of his net worth and looked at Jesus and turned and walked away. It was here in the text that I questioned Jesus and wondered why He did not chase the young man down and change the conditions to letting him in the kingdom of heaven. It was here that God showed me that Jesus watched the young man walk away from eternal life to eternal death, because God demands to be **first** or nothing at all.

In his book, *The Cost Of Discipleship*, the great German theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, sites this passage (Mark 10:17-23), particularly the young man, as an example of “cheap grace.” He states that whenever a believer wants the grace of God, and the salvation of it that comes from our faith in Jesus, without giving up some thing(s), the believer then cheapens God’s grace. Bonhoeffer defines cheap grace as grace without discipleship. Cheap grace “is the grace which amounts to the justification of sin without the justification of the repentant sinner who departs from sin and from whom sin departs.”¹¹ It is a grace that we bestow on ourselves. Bonhoeffer goes on to say that cheap grace is “the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, and absolution without personal confession.”

¹¹Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York, NY: Touchstone Simon & Schuster, 1959), 44.

¹² I believe also that cheap grace is a grace that seeks a crown without a cross. For Jesus says in Luke 9:23 *“If any man will come after me [be My disciple], let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.”* (KJV)

One cannot have salvation without first repenting. The word “repent” means to literally turn around. Sin cannot be seen as black or white. There is no line that delineates sin. The question of when did Adam and Eve sin? Was it when they bit, chewed, or swallowed the fruit? The answer is none of the above. Sin is in the heart, and it is there that we are drawn away from God. Sin is a direction (and not a line) that leads away from God. So then “repentance” is turning away from sin and back to God. It is a 180 degree turn.

Justification is the legal term for forgiveness. It is a legal pardon of a person who is guilty beyond the shadow of a doubt.

Sanctification is the salvific process of making a person holy. In short, it is the transformative process in which believers become more like Christ.

DISCIPLESHIP PRINCIPLES (Continued)

It has been said repeatedly that salvation is free because Jesus paid it all. However, there is a cost that comes with discipleship. The purpose of this lesson is to discuss of discipleship.

¹²Ibid., 44, 45.

Student Questions:

1. What is Grace?
2. What is Faith?
3. What is Belief?
4. What is it that I must give-up, in order to follow Jesus?
5. Am I a Devoted Disciple or a Casual Christian?

Christianity has no cost in America. We've made it way too easy to be "born again" – perhaps much easier than Jesus intended. When do we get to the point at which we accept smaller numbers of intensely devoted people rather than feverishly investing in filling auditoriums and stadiums with massive numbers of the lukewarm "Christians" that Jesus promised to spew from his mouth?¹³

--- George Barna

Study:

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. Ephesians 2:8-9 (KJV)

It has often been said that "salvation is free," because "Jesus paid it all." However, there is a wide assumption that because salvation is free it is cheap and it does not cost us (believers) anything. Well first of all it is not cheap because it cost Jesus his very life. Jesus freely gave up his life for us (his friends) so that we would not have to die for our own sins. So our salvation, though it is free, came at a great cost. Secondly, this author contends that in order for a person to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior they must give-up something. If Christ is to be Lord of our lives, then we must be willing to give-up control

¹³George Barna, "Barna's Beefs #5," in *The State of the Church 2002* (Ventura, CA: Barna Research Group, 2002), in Holly Peters, "Evangelicals on the Decline," *Biola Connection*, fall 2002, 10-15.

of our lives to Him. Even though Paul argues that we are saved by grace through faith in Christ Jesus, and not of works, our works are still essential. Because James said, *"But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."* James 2:20,26 (KJV)

We do not work to get saved, but we work because we are saved. God's goal for every believer is to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. God saved us for His purpose, and His purpose is for us to work to fulfill His will.

The cost that *comes with* salvation is significant. Dietrich Bonhoeffer suggests that this cost is so great because it requires the believer to sell-off, give-up or let-go the most significant thing or person in their life in order to follow Jesus. In Mark 10:23-25, Jesus states how difficult it is to enter the Kingdom of God without giving-up that which you cherish. The bible sets forth a pattern of sacrifice to become a disciple of God.

- Abraham had to be willing to give-up Isaac.
- Moses had to be willing to give-up his life and return back to Egypt where he was wanted.
- Hannah had to be willing to give-up her child in order to have a child.
- Elisha had to be willing to leave his mother and father.
- Jeremiah had to be willing to give-up his desires and preach God's judgment.
- Matthew had to give-up his government job collecting taxes.
- Peter, Andrew, James and John all gave-up their fishing businesses to become fishers of men.

Like these great historians, we are all called to forsake our desires and follow Christ.

Peter told Jesus in Mark 10:28, *"We have left everything to follow you!"* (NIV) This is the cost of discipleship that comes with salvation. It is this cost of discipleship that has been hidden or missing from salvation. The attempt to have a "cross-less" Christianity (a Christianity that is devoid of sacrifice from the believer) will leave the believer, just like the rich young ruler, outside of the Kingdom of God.

DISCIPLESHIP AND MATURATION

After accepting Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior every believer is “born again.” As new believers we are babes in Christ in need of maturing. The purpose of this lesson is to discuss how discipleship is a key part to the maturation process of every new believer.

Student Questions:

1. How are we “Born Again”?
2. Is there a place in the church where I fit in?
3. What happens if I am out of place?

Study:

Ephes. 4:1-10 (KJV)

I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, [2] With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; [3] Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. [4] There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; [5] One Lord, one faith, one baptism, [6] One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. [7] But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. [8] Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. [9] (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? [10] He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) Ephes. 4:11-16 (KJV)

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; [12] For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: [13] Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: [14] That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; [15] But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: [16] From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

The challenge of increasing the level of discipleship among new gentile Christians is what the author addresses in chapter 4:11-16 of his letter to the Ephesians. This challenge is the same for every newly converted believer today. In verse 11 the author resumes his train of thought from verse 7 with the gifts of Grace from Christ to those in the clerical realm of the ecclesia (church). As the author focuses his attention on the local church he groups “pastors” and “teachers” together probably suggesting that they have overlapping qualities. Within the Black Baptist denomination it is understood, for the most part, that a person can be a teacher without being a pastor, but a person cannot be a pastor without being able to teach. It is the pastors and teachers, using their gifts for instructing, who equip or make ready the saved for kingdom service.

An in depth look at verse 12 in the original Greek text provides a clearer understanding of the author's intent. This intent can be misconstrued or even lost when read from the King James Version of the bible which is commonly used within the Black Baptist denomination.

¹¹ And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; ¹² For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: ¹⁴

In the earliest MSS there is no comma after the word “ἁγίων” (saints). However, the King James Version has mistakenly added one. As a result, verse 12 appears to be a list of things to be accomplished by the pastors and teachers mentioned in verse 11. For years, in the minds of many Black folk in the Baptist church, this rendering of the text has placed the responsibility of kingdom work squarely on the shoulders of the clergy. Further clarity of the text can be made by translating the word “πρός” (“for” in the King James Version) into its most common translation “to.” When placed together with the word “καταρτισμον,” which is a surgical term used for the *setting* of a broken bone, the beginning of verse 12 should read “to the setting” (πρός τον καταρτισμον). Thus translating verse 12 as; “To the setting of the saints into the work of the ministry to build up the body of Christ.” This translation keeps with the author's anthropomorphic statement in verse 16 whereby he closes this thought (or ends the sentence in the KJV) by stating that “the whole body is joined and held together by ligaments.”

¹⁴*The Holy Bible: King James Version.* 1995, (Oak Harbor, WA:Logos Research Systems, Inc.)

In verses 13-15 the author deals with the maturation of the believers which is quite relevant in the continual development of new disciples. In verse 13 the author states that the ultimate aim of the believers should be their completeness in Christ. It appears here that the author alludes to the Apostle Paul's statement in Philippians 1:6 where Paul says "that [Jesus] who began a good work in you, would complete it, until the day of Jesus Christ." (New King James) In verse 3 the author presents "the unity of the Spirit" as a gift to be guarded. While here in verse 13 he presents "the unity of faith" as a goal to be reached. He suggests that the ultimate level of maturity is seen in the "unity" of faith, while individualism is seen as immaturity. This is clearly seen in the Greek text with the phrase "εἰς ἀνδρα τελειον" which means literally "into a perfect, full-grown man." Note the singularity of the word "man" (not men). The church as a whole is seen as one only when the individuals have *matured* in Christ.

The two key words within the selected pericope are "καταρτισμον" (to set in place) and "τελειον" (fully complete or perfect). The former deals with the believer's *placement* (in ministry) while the latter deals with the believer's *purpose* (assignment in ministry or call). The intended goal is for believers to be placed in a position where they can fully perfect or, as the author puts it, mature in their call. This is vital for a church attempting to increase the level of discipleship in new believers.

The metaphor of "maturity" is carried over from verse 13 into verse 14. The author continues to express the importance of new believers maturing in Christ. Here in verse 14 the author reveals the dangers of immaturity. The infantilism of believers not only prevents the kingdom of God from advancing into the kingdoms of this world, but it

leaves the immature believers vulnerable to be knocked out of place within the body of Christ and lead astray. The author builds upon the Apostle Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 13:11 where he says, "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I *understood* as a child, I *thought* as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things." (KJV) The author argues that infantilism's greatest weakness is witnessed in the mind where the believers' thoughts and understanding are vulnerable to corruption. It is the mind of the believer that *wavers* back and forth with whatever doctrine seems right or popular. The Greek text says "κλυδωνιζομενοι και περιφερομενοι" which means "being blown and swung around." Like a spinning top the immature believer's mind is made dizzy from the different doctrines being spoken by crafty and cunning people whose aim is to deceive.

However, in verse 15 the author contrasts the deceptions of crafty and cunning people with the integrity of the gospel (the truth). The word "αλφειουντες," translated in the King James as "speaking the truth," literally means "doing (living) truth" which is the key to maturity. The author then uses the anthropomorphic analogy of "growing up" into Him who is the Head as a sign of maturity. R. A. Knox points out that a baby's head is unusually large in comparison with the rest of its body. As the baby develops, however, its body *grows up* into a due proportion with the head.¹⁵ The thought of "growing up into" or "fitting" the Head of Christ brings the reader full circle with the author's argument in vs. 12 where the new believer is "set" or "fitted" for the work of the ministry to build up the body of Christ.

¹⁵R. A. Knox, *St. Paul's Gospel* (London, UK: Sheed and Ward, 1953), 84.

DISCIPLESHIP AND MATURATION

Continued

As disciples of Jesus Christ we are transformed from the immature and lost children we were, into the matured and purpose filled sons (daughters also) God has created us to be. The purpose of this lesson is to highlight a biblical example of God's transformative and maturing process in the life of an individual.

Student Questions:

1. Why does God call us by what we might not be?
2. Why does the Angel call Gideon a "mighty man of valor?"
3. How do we become who God is calling us?

Study:

I believe that the story of Gideon, found in the 6 chapter of the book of Judges, is an excellent example of a person being *placed* in a position (Judge) in order to mature into or perfect his call which in turn aids the collective people of God.

Now the Angel of the Lord came and sat under the terebinth tree which was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, while his son Gideon threshed wheat in the winepress, in order to hide it from the Midianites. [12] And the Angel of the Lord appeared to him, and said to him, "The Lord is with you, you mighty man of valor!" [13] Gideon said to Him, "O my lord, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, 'Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt?' But now the Lord has forsaken us and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites." [14] Then the Lord turned to him and said, "Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Have I not sent you?"

[15] So he said to Him, "O my Lord, how can I save Israel? Indeed my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house." [16] And the Lord said to him, "Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat the Midianites as one man." ¹⁶

The author (or authors accounting for the three distinctive parts) of the book of Judges is unknown. It is believed that the book was composed from oral tradition during the early monarchy of Israel. However, scholars believe that the book received some form of redaction during the postexilic period and then later in the 7th century the book was shaped into its current form. The literary form of Judges has been classified as "epic," a form associated with the heroic age. Cyrus H. Gordon has noted many parallels between Judges and the Greek epics, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. ¹⁷

The story of Gideon in chapter 6 deals with his spiritual and developmental growth. This maturation process is similar to that of new believers in the church who are struggling to find their place and purpose in the body of Christ.

The text opens with Israel once again "doing evil in the sight of God" and as a result being placed under the oppression of the Midianites. In verse 11 the angel of the Lord finds Gideon cowering in a wine press *threshing wheat* and says to him "the Lord is with you, you mighty man of valor!" (NKJ) Although Gideon in verse 15 argues against the Lord's declaration by stating that he is the weakest person from the weakest clan in Israel, God still called him a mighty man of valor. The Lord called Gideon not by who he was, but by who he would become. The process of Gideon's maturation parallels that of

¹⁶ Judges 6:11-16 [NKJV]

¹⁷ Cyrus H. Gordon, *The Common Background of Greek and Hebrew Civilizations* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton, 1965), 222-26, 283-84.

the wheat he was threshing. Just as wheat is transformed into bread, Gideon will be transformed from the weak coward he was, to the mighty man of valor God was calling him to be.

Through a series of test Gideon's faith grew in the Lord. As a result he was able to lead ten men into tearing down the altar to Baal and building up an altar to the "Lord [their] God." Because of Gideon's obedience to the Lord in tearing down the altar of Baal the people of Israel re-name him "Jerub-Baal" (let Baal fight him).

In Chapter 7 Gideon's sphere of influence has grown from 10 servants to 32,000 men. However, like the kernels of wheat that must be separated from the chaff, Gideon had to be separated from some of his men. The chaff, which surrounds the kernels of wheat, looks good but in actuality it is worthless because it has no nutritional value. Gideon has 22,000 soldiers who look like warriors, but like the chaff they are worthless because they are afraid to fight. God finishes separating the men down to 300 who knew how to watch and drink (similar to "watch and pray").

Verse 8 of chapter 7 states that Gideon "kept" (in the Hebrew 'heheziq be', which means "to take fast hold of") the 300 men. This implies that they too wanted to leave because they did not believe that they could win, but Gideon convinced them to stay with him.

After being separated from the chaff the kernels of wheat are then ground into flour where it can then be made into bread. The culmination of the transformation of both the wheat and Gideon can be seen in verses 13 and 14 of chapter 7 when the enemy soldier reveals his dream of "a round loaf of barley bread" crashing into the camp of the

Medianites and destroying them. His friend, in turn, interprets the “loaf of bread” as Gideon the mighty man of Valor.

In conclusion, the maturation of Gideon is achieved once he was placed in the position of leadership and full potential of his gifting was realized. His strategic plan of war and matured faith in God demonstrates his complete capability to serve as a Judge for Israel.

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